



Adult Ministries

Lessons for Couples 2022

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Mesoamerica Region

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Study Guide

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Presentation

The Sunday School and Discipleship Ministry (SDMI) of the Church of the Nazarene is organized by developing Adult Ministries, Youth Ministries, and Children's Ministries.

This material is a guide to Marriage Ministries from SDMI and aims to help members of the Church of the Nazarene learn biblical teaching on the holy life of marriage, and put it into practice in their daily lives, in order to grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

The areas of this ministry for marriages and its objectives are as follows:

a. *Spiritual area:*

- Motivate couples to be consecrated under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- Do personal evangelism with other couples.
- Strengthen the worship of God and devotional life.

b. *Ministerial area:*

- Recognize that marriages have a responsibility for the preservation and growth of the work of God.
- Work on building the family and church.
- Help couples serve in the church.

c. *Family area:*

- Build your home on the principles and values of the Kingdom of God as shown in the Bible.
- Apply biblical principles and values to a good marital relationship.
- Apply biblical principles and values to parenting.

The book contains 12 lessons that can be shared one per month at couples' meetings. Each lesson contains:

Learning objectives.

They refer to the achievements expected of the student at the end of the study of the lesson.

Introduction.

It's an initial presentation that contextualizes the topic to be addressed in order to engage the learners in the topic.

Theme development.

These lessons have been written in simple, dynamic language connected with the ideas of the contemporary world in order to facilitate their use for teaching.

Conclusion of the main teaching.

At the end of each lesson, a brief conclusion of what has been taught is provided, which can be used at the end of the class as a closing, and in the next session to remind the students of the topics covered.

Dynamics or activities.

Individual or group learning activities or dynamics related to the subject studied are suggested. These can be reproduced for the participants, although it's best that each participant has their own book.

Lesson 1. **Being loved and used in great ways by Jesus**

Bible passage: *1 John 4:7*

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Objective:

- **To evaluate** the spiritual state in which we find ourselves, and to undergo a process of continuous renewal to learn to walk with Jesus and be transformed with the help of the Holy Spirit.

1.1 Introduction

Many times, we've heard the stories of men and women that God has used to build his Kingdom. We usually think of them as supermen and superwomen. But at the time of being chosen and called by God, these people weren't usually "super."

If you have the opportunity to reread and study about Jesus' disciples again, you'll find that as John MacArthur mentions, they were ordinary men. This represents a challenge for us to be people that God can also use in a great way. We want Christ to be able to fulfill his purposes through each one of us, common people like the disciples were.

So we must meditate on where the key points are. Can any of us be used by God in a big way? What does God ask of us? What does he want to do to accomplish His purpose in our life?

1.2 Development

1.2.1 How has God shown us that He loves us?

One of the most powerful weapons that the enemy of our soul has is to make us feel that we're not loved. He wants to make us feel unworthy of receiving love from others. That blocks us and prevents us from loving others. That's why it's important to remember and be grateful for what God has done out of love for us.

Do you know how much God loves you ... how important you are to Him? There are many ways that we can see God's love for us. Remembering some of them will be important to see how you yourself can in turn love others:

1. Jesus laid down his life for us on the cross because of our sins. How much are we willing to suffer for others? (1 John 4:9)
2. Jesus healed the sick. What are we doing for those in need?
3. Even when he was on the cross, he thought of his mother and left her in the hands of John. What kind of care are we providing for our family?
4. He was no respecter of persons. Are we "selective" about who we should love? What has been the criteria so far to decide who to love and who not to love? Can you make a list of those that the enemy has "blocked" you from loving?
5. He forgave our sins. How grateful are we for that? What are we doing because of our gratitude? Have we learned to forgive others?
6. Jesus loves children. How much do you enjoy children? Do you love them all or do only the children of your family seem "adorable"?

7. He never left the disciples alone and promised to always be with us. Can you think of some times when you experienced his presence in the midst of great pain or great difficulty?
8. Jesus came looking for us because we were lost in sin. Are we aware that had it not been for Jesus' sacrifice, we would be condemned to death because of our sin? Are we dealing with sin that we need to acknowledge before God and urgently asking for his help?
9. Jesus always took special care of those most in need (Matt. 25:40). On a day-to-day basis, who are the neediest people around you? What have you been doing for them?
10. For the Father's sake, Jesus obeyed, even suffering death on the cross. Have we been obedient to the Father? How are we loving others? Have we shared the message of salvation with people who don't yet have Him as their personal Savior?

Do you realize how much Jesus loves us? That's why Jesus asks us to love him and our neighbor the way we love ourselves. (Mark 12:29-31)

1.2.2 Let's learn a little more about John, the Son of Thunder

In his work "Twelve ordinary men," John MacArthur (2004) helps us see what each of the disciples were like before they met Jesus and during the beginning of their ministries. We see how Jesus and his grace was with them, leading them through a wonderful process of growth, working to spread the message of salvation in Christ, which continues to this day.

As a matter of space, we'll illustrate that Christlike maturing process through just one of these disciples, who was called "the beloved disciple." Let's start by getting to know John a little more early on in his call. Again, the work of John MacArthur will be of great help to us. What was John's character and personality like?

- He was James' younger brother, and at first, they were always seen together. The two had similar temperaments.
- John was with James, ready to call down fire from heaven against the Samaritans.
- He was also in the middle of the debate about which of the disciples was the most important.
- He had great zeal and showed ambition.
- John was tough and rough, like the rest of the fisherman disciples.
- He rebuked a man for casting out demons in the name of Jesus because the man was not part of the group of disciples (Mark 9:38).

Many times, the enemy deceives us into believing that we cannot be used by God for great things. But the truth is, God, through his grace, chooses even the vilest sinners from among the wicked and transforms them into true instruments of blessing. So, we must hold on to that promise. With all the imperfections that we have, when we bow at the feet of Christ, He will take care of transforming us as he did John, the beloved disciple.

1.2.3 John goes from being the Son of Thunder to being "the beloved disciple"

We've seen John's character and personality. This is how Jesus called him in to ministry and transformed him into a blessing as he built His church and spread the good news. We must not forget that God loves us so much and has wonderful plans for each of us.

Because I know the plans I have about you, says the LORD, plans of well-being and not of evil, to give you future and hope. 12 Then they will call upon me. They will come and pray to me, and I will listen to them. 13 they will seek Me and find Me, for they will seek Me with all their hearts. (Jeremiah 29:11)

There were, among others, two great factors that marked John in a great way:

- 1) **The great love he received from Jesus.** Love was a quality that John learned from Christ. We have said that he had a tough character and his jealousy created problems in a bad way. But the love that distinguished him in his mature age was not something that sprang spontaneously from him. Living for about three years with Christ and his other disciples shaped his character.

His writings, which are among the last to be written in the entire New Testament, reflect great maturity and stand out for a genuine love of Christ and neighbor. That's why he's known as the disciple of love.

So, having undergone such a radical transformation in his life, John encourages and exhorts us by saying: *"for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."* (1 John 5:4)

- 2) John was filled with the Holy Spirit. He saw the years of his old age pass in a very different way than his early days as Jesus' disciple. John MacArthur explains it like this: *"Under the control of the Holy Spirit, all his handicaps were turned into advantages. When you compare the young disciple with the elder patriarch, you will see that as he matured, his spheres of great weaknesses became his strongest points."*

John is a formidable example of what can happen to us when we grow in Christ, letting the strength of the Lord be perfected in our weakness. Therefore, one of our highest priorities in life should be to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit. Let's pause and respond. What stage of Christian maturity are you in? Have you been saved by God's grace? Have you been sanctified by grace in Christ? What is the overwhelming evidence that this is a reality in your life? In case you don't have that experience of sanctification, let's seek that as your first request to Him.

1.2.4 The experience of receiving the love of Jesus and your relationship with Him

John's maturity was a process as he built that loving relationship with Christ. But to capture that level of love and trust, let's take a look at John 13:22-23. We see John there as someone who is already calm and still, leaning on Jesus. What an extraordinary experience that must have been! Physically, it's no longer possible for you to do that. But I invite you to connect in a very intimate way to Jesus' heart. There we'll find what's in the heart of the Father because they are one.

If you're studying this lesson with others, make a collective attempt to describe what you might find in God's heart. I remind you what John found, *"God is love."* (1 John 4:8). Now it's your turn to describe, with all your human limitations, what would Jesus' heart look like on the inside?

Meditate on these questions for your reflection:

- Would you be in the heart of Jesus? How can you substantiate your answer?
- Would your family be there?
- Are the people who are now suffering around us there?
- What place do the lost occupy in Jesus' heart?

John could see all this. Thanks to his intimate closeness to Jesus, his life became a life full of love for others.

1.3 Conclusions

Jesus loves us greatly. Like many others, we've accepted Christ as our personal savior. But maybe we still have personality problems or are struggling with some sin.

After experiencing God's love, and connecting in an intimate way with His heart, we can no longer be the same as we once were. But if we wish to continue to grow in grace, we're now faced with the urgent need to be filled by the Holy Spirit.

With these two experiences, we'll never be able to look at the people around us in the same way as before. I encourage you to take another step forward. As with John, Jesus' love will bring you the growth you need.

Let's pray to imitate John's example, who stood with a deep and abiding love for God's truth and was faithful in proclaiming it to the end.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. How has God shown us that He loves us? Write down at least 5 ways you have experienced God's love.

2. As disciples like John, there are many things that we need to have transformed by God. Write down at least your top 3.

3. What do you need to do to have your life transformed by the Holy Spirit?

4. How can you show your children the love that God has placed in you? Write down at least 5 ways.

5. How can you show the love that God has placed in you to those who don't have Christ as their Savior? Write down at least 5 ways.

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Lesson 2. **The Fruit of the Spirit as Evidence of the Fullness of the Spirit**

Bible passage: *1 Thess. 5:23-24*

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Objective:

- **Understand** God's perfect plan for you to have an abundant and victorious spiritual life and seek the continued filling of the Holy Spirit

2.1 Introduction

Today, there are churches that aren't growing as Jesus wants them to. In John 15:8, he tells us:
This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

In this, we all have co-responsibility: pastors, leaders, lay people in general. Many of us aren't fulfilling the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:18-20.

The explanations of why we don't grow can be quite varied, and there are multiple and varied proposals on how to reverse this slow growth, which in some cases becomes stagnation. However, healthy proposals to promote change to continue growing in healthy ways have as their central axis the spiritual life. This is the key that will trigger other aspects, such as being incarnational witnesses, promoting small group meetings where people are accountable to each other, promoting the transformation of Christlike disciples who make Christlike disciples, etc.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand God's perfect plan for an abundant and victorious spiritual life. An outline will be made of how prevenient grace and saving grace operate. Then special emphasis will be placed on sanctifying grace and grace that helps us grow in the image of Christ.

2.2 Development

2.2.1 Sanctification and the Fruit of the Spirit.

According to Leopoldo Sánchez (2005), an obvious way to see that a person is sanctified is that they show the Fruit of the Spirit in their life. When we observe that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is in us, we can have that conviction. This fruit shows the same character of Christ in us (Gal. 5:22-23).

We must have the mindset of Christ to abide by all that the Father asked of Him (Phil. 2:5). If we are to reflect the mind of Christ, we must reflect His feeling in:

- Rejecting sin.
- Not seeking to be served, but to serve others.
- Not seeking to do our own will.
- Being obedient to death.
- Feeling a great burden for the unsaved, starting with those of our family.

Miller (2000) mentions that the life filled with the Holy Spirit must result in a continuous witness of Christ's love (Acts 1:8) and must move us to a continual transformation (Romans 12:1-2). The Arminian-Wesleyan position is summarized in the following:

1. The need for prevenient grace to sensitize our sinful hearts and lead us to repentance.
2. The need for a transforming experience of divine grace that forgives the sins we've committed.
3. The need for sanctifying grace shown in the purifying power of the Holy Spirit that eradicates original sin from our hearts.
4. The permanent grace that allows me to grow in the image of Christ. (Bangs)

2.2.2 God's Plan to give us his Grace.

2.2.2.1 How is sanctification achieved?

If we don't want to live repeatedly falling into sin, sanctification is a necessity that Paul continually reminds us of. Sanctification *"is effected by filling or baptism with the Holy Spirit; and in a single experience includes the cleansing of sin from the heart and the permanent and continuous dwelling of the Holy Spirit, enabling the believer for life and service."* (Church of the Nazarene, 2017)

2.2.2.2 The conditions for receiving entire sanctification

The conditions for receiving the experience of entire sanctification are:

1. To have experienced saving grace. That is, sanctification is only for believers. From the moment of your salvation, God has been transforming your life.
2. Recognize that God is Holy. When we lose the sense of the sacred, we are about to lose everything. (Mark 8:34-35)
3. Be aware of original sin, and hunger and thirst for full conformity to the image of Christ. (Rom. 8:13; 2 Cor. 9:1)
4. God calls us to be holy. We must have a firm conviction that the Bible calls us to be cleansed from all sin. (Col. 3:12-14; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 John 2:6)
5. There is often a crisis when trying to be like Jesus, until you fall at His feet. This usually happens because it's difficult for some to surrender their whole self. We usually give things to God, but the difficult thing is to give ourselves (Miller, 2000). Then, we have to ask for his sanctifying work through the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). It's a voluntary personal act of faith. Let's ask God with faith. (Phil. 1:6)
6. Jesus sanctifies us through His Holy Spirit. (2 Thess. 2:13)
7. Complete submission of the soul to God (consecration) is required. (Gal. 2:20)
8. It should lead us to a life of practical love for neighbor, including sharing the message of salvation in Christ. (Rom. 6:22; 2 Peter 1:3-4)

It's necessary for us to have faith that results, in addition to being made guiltless and pure, in having heart loyalty to God. This faith comes from the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, entire sanctification embraces the cleansing of the heart as the permanent presence of the H.S., empowering us for life and service.

"Grace is not opposed to effort; it opposes when we try to earn it" Dallas Willard

2.2.3 What comes after sanctifying Grace? Growth.

God's grace continues to work throughout the Christian's life. Once sanctified, we must continue to grow. In that sense, perfection is not static (Taylor: 80). The effectiveness of the Kingdom of God on earth is through the reflection of Christ in equipped people and is shown through serving others with excellence. If the nature of Christ has not become part of people's minds and hearts, there's no expression of genuine service to please him.

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, gives us spiritual gifts, which are supernatural skills given by the Spirit Holy to the believers in Christ (1 Cor.12:7). So, God has equipped us to be actively involved in the mission of the Church, according to the gifts He was pleased to give us. But where does growth lead? It must go in the direction of our growing into the image and likeness of Christ, as expressed by Paul in Romans 8: 29a.

The goal of all spiritual growth, individual and in community, personal and corporate, is to be more and more like Jesus. The act or process of becoming like Jesus is sanctification, and is made possible by sanctifying grace. David Busic

Stephen Miller (2000: 15) reminds us that we have been created for good works (Eph. 2:8-10). So continued service will be of great help to us for growth, along with God's grace. But even the sanctified can fall into a spiritual cooling, caused by disobedience, pride, temptation, or spiritual or physical exhaustion. A healthy and close relationship with Jesus will make it less likely that we'll cool down spiritually.

Paul instructs us to keep training for godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). This training involves specific practices, or means of grace, which John Wesley called works of piety and works of mercy (Busic, 2021: 100):

- a) Works of piety include the means of grace such as praying, reading the Bible, fasting, participating in the Lord's Supper, being baptized, and spending time with other Christians.
- b) Works of mercy are a means of grace in service to others, such as "*feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, receiving the stranger, visiting those in prison or sick...*"

In doing these things, we'll be fulfilling what Paul states in Ephesians 4:16: to serve each other together, to grow as we build up one another.

2.2.4 Sufficient Grace.

Paul also states that our faith and discipline, with the help of the Holy Spirit, will help us grow to be more and more like Christ. This is what Ephesians 4:13 states:

until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

We can grow through grace in the image of Christ. But fully reflecting Christ can only be experienced at glorification. (Phil. 3:12)

God continually works within us and in our whole being, so the masterpiece of our life continues until the final resurrection of all things, including our glorification. David Busic

2.3 Conclusions

Today, many have left their faith. They say, *"You lost me."* They tell the church that it was somehow her fault. In reality, however, they lost themselves ... they lost their sense of identity in Christ. They may blame others for their mistakes, for the decisions they made, but in the end, it's all about helping them come back to God.

It would be fair to say that we haven't always been intentional enough in some churches to explain the doctrine of entire sanctification well. But above all, we haven't helped make this a reality for all of the members of the local church. Today, as in the time of Wesley, there are people who don't help others see the need not only for entire sanctification, but for continuous growth as well.

Therefore, we must focus on all of us attaining this experience of sanctification and maturing as we grow in grace. I think it would be worthwhile at least every year to have a campaign in every local church to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

That transformation is God's work, and we cannot in any way achieve it on our own merits or through any other means. Only God can do it. What we can do is ask in faith and through spiritual disciplines, seeking that God, through His Holy Spirit, will transform us at our core.

The exercise of these spiritual disciplines helps us have a solid spiritual formation. This formation is personal and requires each of us to pursue it if we fervently desire to be progressively transformed (sanctified). It's something that pastors and leaders must continually model and promote.

As each one of us is being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, using the means of grace and spiritual disciplines to grow, we'll experience to a greater degree the life full of love that only God can provide us by being sanctified.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

Have you already been sanctified by the Holy Spirit? If not, decide what you need to do, perhaps with the help of your spouse, to be sanctified, and do it.

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Lesson 3. **Jesus and the Foundations of a Healthy Family**

Bible passage: **Matthew 19:4-6**

"Haven't you read," he [Jesus] replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Objective:

- **Learn** principles on healthy family development from Jesus' ministry.

3.1 Introduction

The concept of the family is described extensively throughout the Bible. The Old Testament (OT) establishes rules for family coexistence and envisions progress of the family towards the ideal, beginning in the Pentateuch and ending with a metaphor of God's Covenant with the people of Israel as a representation of marriage. In this way, the prophetic books close the O.T. with the hopeful promise of the coming of the saving Messiah as a result of God's endearing love for Israel, who is illustrated as his bride.

For the fulfillment of the Messianic promise, Jesus became incarnate. His earthly ministry didn't seek to nullify the teachings of the OT regarding the family or anything else. His mission was to bring them to full completion, to set an example of how they should be lived out.

Therefore, as far as the family is concerned, Jesus came to exemplify the faithful and loving husband who is illustrated in the prophets, thus giving multiple contributions during his ministry to the foundations of a healthy family. In the words of Caravias (2014), *"Jesus' message about the family does not constitute any new ideas, but the conclusion of an evolutionary process that lasted centuries."* In this lesson, we'll look at some contributions of Jesus' ministry to a healthy family.

3.2 Development

In analyzing the ministry of Jesus Christ, it's evident that his contributions to the theme of the family and its applications today occur in at least four different ways:

- specific teachings on the subject of the family,
- his general teachings that can be applied to the family,
- allegories regarding his spiritual family and,
- his lifestyle and social interaction with those around him.

3.2.1 Specific teachings on the family

Jesus took every opportunity that came his way to teach his disciples and the crowd that followed him. The passage in Matthew 19 is an example. Here the Pharisees tried to tempt him with controversial questions in order to judge his answers. But His answers were very wise, and they are important lessons for today's healthy family.

a. Unity in marriage. Matthew 19:4-6

The term "*one flesh*" represents the unity that must exist in every way between the couple. This concept includes the physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and even financial aspect that must exist between the spouses. Man and woman are no longer two separate entities, but one.

Therefore, marriage takes precedence over all other earthly relationships. In a healthy family, family life decisions should be made as a couple, and with God's direction, without being carried away by the opinion or influence of other people.

b. The indissolubility of marriage

I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9)

According to the Law, the man could divorce his wife when he found something "*indecent*" in her, which could range from major faults to insignificant things such as the wife burning the food (Cabrera, 2014). Jesus was now removing divorce as an option to leave one's wife for "*any reason.*" In the same way, he was exalting the courage of the woman so that she would cease to be seen as an object or property, doing away with the husband's unilateral right to abandon her.

For the family to be healthy, it's imperative that there be mutual respect between both spouses, without a sense of domination or superiority. In addition to this, the couple must be aware that God doesn't want marriages to dissolve, and then strive to continue growing their marriage in a healthy way.

3.2.2 General teachings applicable to the family.

In addition to explicitly teaching on topics such as marriage, Jesus passed on teachings on general topics that can and should be applied to the family to be healthy.

a. The need for constant forgiveness. Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Forgiveness was a recurring theme in Jesus' teachings. When Peter seemed to have learned the lesson about the importance of forgiving others many times, Jesus replied that he must forgive even more. The same is applicable within the family. Since all family members are human beings with virtues and defects, it's guaranteed that sometimes there will be difficulties and disagreements that can cause problems and hurt feelings. Before looking for a culprit, it's important that we learn to forgive each other again and again, without keeping track of the mistakes of the other.

Forgiveness is essential to avoid roots of bitterness that in the future can bring fatal consequences in the family relationship if they aren't removed quickly.

b. The kind treatment of others. Matthew 5:31

Jesus gives us *the golden rule* to encompass what He was teaching the crowd during the Sermon on the Mount. He was basically telling them to think about others and not just themselves. We must treat others the way we want to be treated.

It's easy to criticize and judge without understanding or being empathetic, but this attitude never leads to good things. Kind treatment within the family should always be done. There will be times when it's not easy to show kindness and empathy to each other, but we must strive to do so with God's help, thus showing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

3.2.3 Allegories of his spiritual family.

Jesus spoke very naturally about his Heavenly Father. Whether directly or through a parable, Jesus lets us see the kind and loving nature of the Father, and the close relationship between Father and Son. Through these allegories, we are also given valuable contributions applicable to the healthy family.

a. The love of parents towards their children. (Luke 15:20-22)

So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

The parable of the prodigal son illustrates the great love, compassion and kindness of a father towards his child. Although he had left the house and wasted his fortune, the father was willing to forgive him.

Just as our Heavenly Father is loving and kind, parents are to love their children without condition. Children are going to make mistakes and can bring us disappointment at times when making wrong decisions. Even so, out of love, parents must always be willing to welcome them back with open arms, give them new opportunities, and seek their spiritual growth and maturity at all times.

b. The subjection of children to parents. (Matthew 26:39)

Going a little farther, he [Jesus] fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Jesus' purpose on earth was to fulfill his Father's will. Knowing that His purpose would not be easy, He gave us a great example of obedience. With the event of the cross approaching, Jesus demonstrated his humanity by asking the Father to deliver him from the great suffering that awaited him if possible.

But his prayer ended with a phrase that leaves us a great teaching for the family, *"not my will be done, but yours."* The obedience and subjection of children to parents is key to having a healthy family environment.

c. Communication, a means for intimacy. (John 10:15a)

... just as the Father knows me [Jesus] and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Every time Jesus talked about his Father, he revealed the deep intimacy that existed between them. Jesus knew in depth the heart and desires of his Father ... he knew Him well. They had this intimate relationship, not only because they shared God's glory, but because now that Jesus was on earth, he maintained that closeness with God the Father through constant communication. We repeatedly read that Jesus took time apart to pray and spend time in communion with his Father. This reality gives us another key for today's family: the relevance of communication for intimacy and family unity, and the value of prayer.

3.2.4 His lifestyle

Beyond his words, Jesus left us an infinity of practical lessons that we can apply to have a healthy family. His daily life and interactions with those around him leave us a model worthy of imitation in family life.

a. Service to others and sacrifice. (John 13:4-6)

So he [Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus' life was a model of service and sacrifice for others at all times. Being God, he didn't cling to that position, but humbly stripped himself of his own desires in order to put others first. He showed us what true friendship is, being willing to serve, to sacrifice, to give everything. He came to give His life. In order to have a healthy family, it's imperative that we adopt this model of service and sacrifice.

Selfishness and pride have destroyed many homes, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can avoid them and be humble.

b. The kingdom of heaven as a priority. (Luke 2:48-49)

When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you" "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

This is a controversial verse when analyzing the contributions of Jesus' ministry to the concept of the family since it seems to challenge the authority of his earthly parents. The truth is that there is something to highlight about this event, and that is that Jesus' priority was the business of his Heavenly Father, that is, the affairs of the Kingdom of Heaven. This principle is vitally important to the success of a healthy family.

As a family, it's important that the priority is always focused on knowing and doing God's will. By doing this, all the decisions that need to be made will become simpler and clearer to know what needs to be done. If from an early age this example is given to children at home, they will also be prepared so that in the future, when they form their own family, it will be a happy and healthy one.

3.3 Conclusions

As Maldonado (2006) states, *"through his teaching and practice, Jesus expanded the meaning of the word 'family'."* His contributions to this topic are vast and occur in different ways.

Jesus specifically taught in Matthew 19 about the family by highlighting the unity in marriage as the couple became one flesh, and the indissolubility of marriage by condemning divorce. In addition to direct teachings, Jesus' teachings on general themes are also applicable to the family. For example, Jesus instructed Peter about the need for constant forgiveness, and on another occasion, challenged the crowd listening to his Sermon on the Mount to treat others kindly.

Another important aspect of the contributions of Jesus' ministry to the foundations of a healthy family is given through the allegories of his spiritual family. When Jesus refers to his Heavenly Father, his loving and kind character is evident, which teaches us the love of parents toward children.

On the other hand, the subjection of children to parents is also essential, and we see it exemplified in the life of Christ as he obediently fulfilled the will of his father on earth. During His ministry, Jesus also reminds us that communication is a means of intimacy since He often sought to take time away to pray and commune with His father.

In addition to the words and allegories that he used, Jesus' lifestyle and the way he interacted with the people around him leave us a great legacy worthy of imitation in the family environment. The life of Jesus Christ was one of service and sacrifice for others, so much so that He gave His own life for us. But perhaps the most relevant contribution of Jesus' ministry to a stable family is his example of leading a life that makes the kingdom of heaven a priority.

If we put God at the center of our families, and ask for the Holy Spirit's help in following the example of word and conduct left to us by Jesus Christ, we can build healthy and successful families in the light of the Bible.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. Ask your spouse: What would you like to do differently to keep growing?

2. Express to your spouse what you would like to see changed and explain why.

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Lesson 4. Spiritual development in the family

Biblical text: Titus 3:3-7

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
(2 Cor. 3:18)

Objectives:

- Value the importance of the spiritual formation of our family for the fulfillment of God's purpose in our lives.
- Identify examples in the Bible of spiritual care that our family should have.
- Develop a spiritual formation plan for our family.

4.1 Introduction

Our families experience various difficulties throughout their different stages of growth and development. That tends to make them lose sight of God's purpose for their lives. The church's focus should not be to provide a "set of rules" that regulate the lives of family members. Rather, the central focus is to implement a discipleship process that helps everyone to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. That will help them grow healthily and achieve the purpose that God has for them.

Every Christian parent is responsible for the spiritual development of their family. Unfortunately, we live in a time when divorces are on the rise and new marriages are on the decline. There are many problems such as financial problems, poor communication, not knowing how to resolve conflicts properly, infidelity, etc. However, the underlying reason is the lack of influence of Christian faith and standards on the healthy development of the family.

Therefore, it's essential that in this Manual we study the way in which the spiritual life of each member is developed. The Bible teaches us that it is our responsibility as parents to provide for the healthy development of our children in all aspects: physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual.

50 years ago, parents were likely to have many children. Today, children are more likely to have many parents.

4.2 Development

4.2.1 Ensuring the healthy spiritual development of our family

Spiritual formation is the process through which a person can grow spiritually, seeking to know God more and more. That will help you grow to become more and more like Christ. As parents, we must make sure that the spiritual formation of our children is our highest priority. Today there are many false ideas about spirituality, what it is and how to develop it, which include practices such as meditating and entering into an altered state of consciousness, etc.

Correct spiritual formation results in the spiritual transformation of the person, through the work of the Holy Spirit. That transformation is on the inside. Ana María Baldrich (2015) mentions that "one of the most important consequences of the current lifestyle is the loss of

inner life." The lack of spirituality prevents many from building their lives authentically and joyfully. That leads many to adopt an exterior façade, but inside they're empty. Another group of people tends to develop a "me" that appears to be strong and powerful, but false. They know that their life is just a fictitious appearance. This merely external transformation isn't what Christians seek (Baldrich, 2015).

Our challenge is to correctly understand and live out our relationship with Christ. This implies knowing him genuinely. It's our responsibility as parents to instill in our children a reverent fear of God ... a fear and love of God that guides them in all their actions no matter where and with whom they are. Kathryn Albig (2020) explains that this fear of God is:

- Recognizing that we have an unpayable debt to God for each of His blessings, but especially for giving us His Son Jesus through whom we can receive salvation. (John 3:16)
- Being afraid of dishonoring Christ with evil deeds. This will motivate me to be careful in all that I think and do (Prov. 16:6).
- Seeking to please Him rather than seeking to impress people. (1 Peter 1:24-25)
- Fearing the loss of His presence because of my sin (Psalm 51:12).
- It's the fear of letting God down, of behaving in a way that is unworthy of Him. (Col. 1:10)
- It's the fear that moves me to detest sin that takes me away from Him (Rom. 7:13).
- It's a fear that moves me to submit to Him (Psalm 33:8).
- It's a fear that moves us to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength (Matthew 22:36-38).
- It's the fear of not being able to see things and people as Jesus sees them (Mt 9:36).

***I am a friend to all who
fear you, to all who follow
your precepts.
(Psalm 119:63)***

As you can see, the fear of God is not a fear that paralyzes us, but on the contrary, it drives us to be more like Jesus. True, there is also the fear of God's punishment, but that's another issue.

4.2.2 Benefits of a spiritual life in the family

If we have an agape love for our children and spouse, and put into action the Fruit of the Spirit, there's nothing that can prevent us from continually working on the spiritual formation of our children. For them, it will be something they'll remember for a lifetime. They'll think of their parents praying with them, studying the Bible together, serving together, etc.

**"Spiritual formation has weight only when the teaching we give to our children is first reflected in our behavior as parents."
Sixto Porras**

That will give them the foundation for when they themselves start their own family. So, although it is an obligation, we must rather think that it is a privilege to be able to help their hearts to be shaped by God. Sixto Porras warns us that "spiritual formation has weight only when the teaching we give to our children is first reflected in our behavior as parents."

Spiritual formation allows us to truly know God. Sixto Porras (2017) shares the following benefits of developing a healthy spiritual life:

1. It gives us the ethical and moral foundation that serves as a norm for the family.
2. It allows us to be intentional and systematic in passing on our faith and hope to our children.
3. We teach our children to trust God through Word and example.
4. We develop a discipline that will mark the life of each one.
5. Unity strengthens us as a family.
6. We teach them to rest in God even in the midst of storms.
7. It strengthens us as a family to face any crisis we encounter.
8. It teaches us to dialogue as a family and to listen to each other.
9. It helps us focus on God's purpose for our lives.
10. It improves our family relationships by being able to recognize ourselves as fallible people, helping us to forgive ourselves and ask for forgiveness when we make mistakes.

It is of the utmost importance to emphasize that not helping them in their spiritual formation while we have them at home can bring serious consequences. In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18-23), we are taught that:

- When one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. No one wants their family to be lost because they didn't invest their time in teaching God's Word to their children.
- We can start with joy, but we must not allow our children to stumble when affliction comes because we didn't help them deepen their faith.
- Let's not allow the eagerness and deception of riches to drown out the Word and make it fruitless. Set aside time for what really transcends this life.

I invite you to take a little time and think about where you want your family to go when Christ comes for his church. Are you doing your part as a family to go with Jesus? May our life not end like that of the rich man who spent it going from banquet to banquet until he died. Then, going to eternal punishment, he took pity on his family and looked for ways in which at least his father and brothers would be saved and would not have to pay for their sins for all eternity. But there was no longer anything he could do (Luke 16:9-31).

Growing spiritually personally and as a family costs a lot of effort. Not growing spiritually costs one's spiritual life.

If you truly love your family and aren't doing your part to help them grow spiritually, ask God for forgiveness. Then, decide to do whatever it takes to fulfill this crucial responsibility. Implementing spiritual formation for yourself and for your family costs a lot of effort. But not doing so costs one's spiritual life.

4.2.3 Ways to strengthen spirituality

As Christians, we can focus on the pattern that Jesus left us and that his disciples adopted. The Bible confirms our responsibility to lead our children in the fear of God. Many of the New Testament epistles are aimed at teaching us how to live a life that pleases God. This will only

be possible through our obedience and submission to the Holy Spirit in all things. Some of the spiritual disciplines that Jesus taught us by his example are:

- The study and meditation of the Word. We must remember that in Jesus' time, there was already a translation from Hebrew to Greek, called the Septuagint. That translation was done in the third century B.C. Evidently Jesus had a broad knowledge of the Bible and could quote it with certainty.
 - Jesus showed us that He knew the Word from a young age (Luke 2:46,47).
 - When tempted in the wilderness, he responded to Satan with three quotations from the Word, showing what it really teaches (Matthew 4:1-11).
 - Jesus tells us that the one who knows and keeps His commandments is the one who truly loves Him, and He also loves him (John 14:21-24).
 - When he throws out the temple vendors, he clarifies, "In Scripture it is said, My house is a house of prayer." (Matthew 21:13)
 - Concerning the most important commandment of the Law, Jesus quotes from the book of Deuteronomy: "You shall love the Lord your God." (Matthew 22:36-37)
- Prayer. We can see Jesus as the model for recognizing the value of prayer. As we study the Word, we see Jesus:
 - Praying in the wilderness before he began his ministry. (Matthew 4:1-11)
 - Praying before choosing his disciples. (Mark 3:13-19)
 - Praying interceding for his disciples. (John 17:15)
 - Praying for the unity of the disciples. (John 17:22)
 - Praying to do the Father's will. (Luke 22:44)
 - Asking us to pray so we won't fall into temptation. (Matthew 26:41)
 - Exhorting us to present our needs in prayer. (Matthew 7:7-12)
 - Giving us a model of prayer in the Lord's Prayer. (Matthew 6:5-15)
- Fasting
 - He fasted for 40 days in the wilderness before beginning his ministry. (Matt. 4:1-11)
 - He teaches us that certain kinds of spirits can only be cast out through prayer and fasting. (Matt. 17:21)
 - He teaches us that we should not fast to impress others. (Matt 6:16-19)
- The sacraments.
 - Jesus instituted Holy Communion for the purpose of continually remembering the sacrifice He made for our sins, and in so doing, we remember His Second Coming and to be prepared at all times. (Luke 22:7-23)
 - Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist to identify with us. (Matt. 3:13-17)

- Christian service
 - He stripped himself of his deity to take the form of a servant. (Phil. 2:6-8)
 - He stressed that he came to serve, not to be served. (Mark 10:45)
 - He always showed himself to be the one who serves. (Luke 22:24, 27b)
 - He teaches us how to serve others. (Mark 10:43-44)
 - Jesus took the opportunity to highlight what he had already taught throughout his ministry before going to the cross. He washed their feet and reminded them of the importance of service. (Luke 22:24-30)

4.2.4 Obstacles we may encounter

Undoubtedly, you'll encounter multiple obstacles in implementing a spiritual formation plan for your family. The Bible warns us that the enemy's purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy. But we have Jesus on our side, and He wants to give us life in abundance (John 10:10). Things that we must consider are:

1. Don't allow your spiritual disciplines to become mere ritualism that don't lead to true transformation.
2. Adjustment in family routines will be required. It may be difficult to set aside the necessary time.
3. All discipline takes work, especially at first, but don't get discouraged.
4. Parents can't excuse themselves from not "being prepared" to teach their children biblical truths.
5. Teach them not just with your words, but model it as parents.
6. You may have to deal with a lack of parental authority if you have children who don't obey.
7. Don't give up because of arguments from your children.
8. Make sure you carry out concrete actions.

4.2.5 What would happen if Jesus came to your house to evaluate you?

Perhaps you may say that as a family you're doing fine. Sometimes we compare ourselves to other families who are struggling, and thus we evaluate ourselves highly in comparison. But what if it was our Lord Jesus who came to do an evaluation? Would his assessment match ours? Let's not take any risks. In fact, the Bible declares to us in Revelation 3:20: *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*

He is jealous and holy, so he won't hesitate to point out everything bad he finds in your house. Remember the passage when Jesus entered the temple? He felt anger seeing that his house was everything but a house of prayer. I propose that you cleanse your house and your hearts, knowing that your guest is Jesus.

- If there are serious problems, don't hesitate to ask your pastor or leader for support.
- Thoroughly cleanse your home and your hearts, knowing that Jesus is your guest.
- Then ask forgiveness for all sin.
- Establish your family worship to continue learning from Christ (Rom. 10:17).
- Make a commitment before God to be faithful to Him.
- Celebrate.

4.3 Conclusions

Correct spiritual formation will result in a spiritual transformation of the person, through the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. Spiritual formation is a lifelong process. It will allow us to continue to grow in the likeness of Christ, reflected in a Spirit-led life and disciplined lifestyle that moves us to share the gospel message and serve in the building up of His church.

Our prayer is that through a correct spiritual formation of our family through his Holy Spirit, God will help us to be transformed, just as he transformed the lives of his servants such as Joseph, Daniel, Paul, etc.

My commitment to God.

Activities to do

1. Choose a character from the Bible and describe how their spiritual growth took place.

2. Prepare a diagnosis of the practice of spiritual disciplines of each member of your family.

3. Develop a plan to improve the practice of spiritual disciplines in your family.

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Lesson 5. Using criticism in an uplifting way

Bible passage: *Matthew 7:1-5*

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged ..."

Objectives:

- **Learn** to listen to the criticism of others, knowing how to distinguish the constructive from that which seeks to do harm.
- **Develop** a spirit of self-evaluation in light of what the Bible asks of us.
- **Healthily express** constructive criticism that serves to build people up.

5.1 Introduction

One of the frequent causes of conflicts that arise in couples, in families, and in any relationship, is the lack of skills to communicate assertively, yet wisely. Sometimes we want to express criticism, but we don't consider the *how*, *where* and *why* of that criticism we express.

Examples include wanting your spouse to see that he is gaining a lot of weight, or that she is not spending money in the best way, or even matters that strongly affect your spiritual life together. But doing so improperly causes bigger problems. This leads to reactions that don't achieve the desired effect and end up creating conflict between you or causing those issues to be ignored.

Should we tell the spouse, leader, sibling or friend what mistakes they're making, or should we keep quiet and let them stumble? These are dilemmas in which some of us find ourselves. On the one hand, we want to express ourselves regarding something, but on the other hand, we find that many people don't want to listen to our suggestions, comments, and criticisms. But what does the Bible tell us? To respond, we'll study biblical examples of how to effectively communicate criticism, what is sought in each case, as well as discover biblical and practical guidelines on how to give criticism that seeks to build people up.

5.2 Development

5.2.1 What is criticism?

Criticism is the act of judging something. Although it's often associated with identifying faults, sins, or flaws, criticism can also express the positive aspects of a person, community, etc. From the Bible Dictionary, depending on the intention with which they are made, there can be three different types of criticism: positive, negative and constructive.

- **Positive:** It seeks to produce an improvement in what is criticized. This attitude recognizes the weak points, and the primary intention of the criticism is to improve something or someone for the benefit of others, of the majority, and for the person's own benefit.
- **Negative:** It is directly aimed at the identity of the person, while feedback is directed at conduct or behavior. It's not the same to say "you are stupid" as it is to say "you did something stupid." The first comment refers to the person, and in the second case it refers to a certain behavior.

- **Constructive:** It is an evaluative expression that is shared to help the other person. The intention is to get the other person to make a positive change, to improve.

Criticism is a scrutiny, examination, analysis, evaluation, opinion, or judgment we make about a person, situation, object, idea, or proposal. It's necessary and inevitable because it allows us to reach conclusions and helps in decision making. Violeta Guerra (2020)

Before criticizing someone or something, we need to remember that biblical criticism is useful, loving, and based on truth. Correction must be with love and grace. Healthy criticism comes from love, not from a bitter heart.

The Bible gives several examples of criticism. Through them, God longs for us to respond with humility and love, and to correct that which is a hindrance to our spiritual lives and to the lives of others. Let's look at some examples:

You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! (Acts 7:51).

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15-16).

Violeta Guerra (2020) believes, and I totally agree with her, that:

A critique that highlights negative points can be constructive if it is expressed with grace, sincerity, and love. When criticism is permeated by the biblical principles of Christian character, His Word, and love of neighbor, it exercises our discernment and leads it from a subjective, flattering, or superficial opinion to an objective, constructive, and blessed judgment.

An example is found in Jeremiah 1:9-10. Although the message spoken by Jeremiah was very harsh because of the disobedience of the kingdom of Judah, its purpose was to uproot evil and instead sow good.

Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

5.2.2 Let's start with self-criticism.

It's very healthy to seek to grow to be like Christ, our model. This involves self-evaluating our heart's intentions. We must see that this contributes greatly to our growth. Then, we will be able to help other people grow, starting with our spouse and family. The Bible teaches us a lot about this:

- God call us to self-examination.

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Matt. 7:1-2)

- Let's be as honest as possible in our self-assessment. Let's not forget to be grateful for the great grace that God gives us every day:
If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? (Psalms 130:3)
- Let's be careful not to judge others when we ourselves have not lived perfectly without sin.
When they kept on questioning him [Jesus], he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7)
- Consider that in the end, we'll all be judged.
You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. (Rom. 14:10)

5.2.3 What care should we take when criticizing?

We should keep in mind the following biblical principles when criticizing:

- Our words must be uplifting:
Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thess. 5:11)
- The main motivation for criticizing is to help someone get out of a mistake or sin.
Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)
- Make sure the criticism is based on the truth. Criticism based on rumors is not helpful; it's gossip. Uninformed criticism will usually end up embarrassing the critic when the truth is revealed (Prov.18:13).

How to criticize constructively

Having seen that constructive criticism is building others up, and in general helps to improve various aspects of their life, it will be good to give some recommendations on how to criticize constructively. We must take into account the following:

1. ***Be careful of the intention with which you criticize.*** Be sure that your motivation in critiquing someone is to help them improve. Do not criticize others if you do the same thing or worse.
2. ***Be careful of the way you say it.***
The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Prov. 12:18)
3. ***Be careful about the place or circumstance in which you say it.***
4. ***Be careful of who you criticize.*** (Romans 14:1) *Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.* On the other hand, if you are willing to listen to criticism from that person, then it's likely that you can also constructively criticize him or her.

5. ***Don't criticize a person behind their back.*** Nobody likes people to talk behind their back. If I speak ill of someone when they aren't present, I'm definitely not looking to help them for the better, because they aren't listening to me. In addition, there will be no shortage of people who will distort what you said.
6. ***Depersonalization.*** Avoid putting the person on the spot because it will provoke anger and shouting. It's not who says it, but what is being said. Labels are a clear signal that you're already personalizing. Avoid strong emotions because they're the most direct route to a fight.

"Grace is directly related to love. The critic must say things with love, if in truth it is intended that his contribution be edifying. A popular adage says that the truth hurts, but I think that saying is just something people who are rude and arrogant hide behind because they don't think before speaking." Bible and opinion

7. ***Be specific in what you're criticizing.*** Don't give an opinion about something you don't know well. Don't use generalities. Be prepared to give facts and practical examples.
8. ***Criticize personally and privately.*** If you criticize someone in public, you put them on the defensive, provoking a negative reaction.
9. ***Provide alternatives, possible improvements or solutions.*** Give them suggestions of how they can improve where you have observed failures. Make sure you've personally tried out the solutions that you're suggesting for them.

5.2.4 How should we take personal criticism?

Christians must learn wisely that constructive criticism is valid. In Proverbs 9:8-9, we're taught:

*Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you.
Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.*

Since we're all critical and we're all criticizable, it's essential to learn to be criticized. Even if we don't criticize others, we'll surely be criticized sooner or later. Therefore, the best protection against criticism is a clear conscience. 1 Peter 3:16 says,

keep a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Emily Sánchez (2020) advises us that if the criticism comes from a wise and fair person, even if it sounds uncomfortable or hurts our ego, we should listen to it. If, on the other hand, the criticism comes from a foolish person, the best thing for our mental, emotional and spiritual health is to ignore it, because it will end up being "destructive".

"Whoever warns you in politics, business or life of what you do wrong is not an opponent, he is an ally." Jorge Melendez (2021)

5.2.5 Beware of being dominated by a critical spirit

There are those who deliberately seek to cause harm, affecting people spiritually, psychologically and/or emotionally. Unfortunately, they find pleasure in being able to negatively impact their victims with their words. A person who has a critical spirit:

- arrogantly judges others.
- finds errors and defects everywhere and in everyone.
- is never completely satisfied with anything.
- does the work of the enemy consciously or unconsciously.

Such an attitude hurts both the criticized and the critic. Undoubtedly that person urgently needs someone to help him if he's willing to receive help. He needs God's grace to be healed and transformed.

The tendency to criticize others is a personal indication of greater spiritual problems, the greatest of which is unbelief and dissatisfaction in God. Envy and jealousy reveal our misunderstanding of God's character, and our distrust of His Word and will for our lives.
Violeta Guerra

Remember all the criticism Nehemiah received when he led the work of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem? The critics will always be there, but we can ignore them. Realize that they won't be able to stop God's purpose in us, nor will they change His promises. His love for us won't change, just because of what a "few malicious people" say. (Sanchez, 2020).

5.3 Conclusions

Criticism can and should be used in a good way and with a positive purpose for the lives of others. It will help us if we continually evaluate ourselves to see if we aren't doing similar things as those we criticize.

It's true that there is some truth in most criticisms, so we must exercise wisdom to distinguish between the truth and the lies, and between criticisms that are meant to help us from those that only seek to harm us. With the negative ones, what we have to do is what Jesus did when the enemy wanted to convince him with lies when he was tempted: Jesus quoted the Word (Luke 4:1-13). The way Jesus acted implies that he knew, had memorized, and believed that Word.

Remember Col. 4:6. *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. Give three examples of how to positively critique something you believe your spouse can improve on.

2. Describe how you could help, in each case, to achieve that change that helps for the better.

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Lesson 6. Conflicts in the family as an opportunity to grow

Bible passage: *Colossians 3:12-14*

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Objective:

- **Learn** biblical and practical principles to face the conflicts that arise in every relationship, so that you will always come out stronger as a couple and as a family.

6.1 Introduction

In the previous lesson, we learned how we can avoid unnecessary conflict. This was by learning to evaluate ourselves in order to keep growing, but also, how we can correctly express criticism to our spouse, our children or someone else. We learned biblical principles on how to do it with love, always seeking to be constructive rather than destructive with what we say.

But even with this, it's to some extent natural that there would be conflicts in the family. Various questions then arise that we'll address in this lesson. How can I use conflict to make my family stronger? What are some ways to find a solution to conflict in my family?

6.2 Development

6.2.1 Conflict and its functions.

It's generally recognized that conflicts arise in every human relationship. So, it's natural that our family will face various conflicts. But the question is, what course will the conflicts take? I have good news for you: you yourself will decide the course that conflicts take. You can take a constructive course or one that brings destruction and damage to your family relationships.

Let's start by showing that the resolution of a conflict is based on a central principle: conflict has many positive functions and values.

- It helps avoid stagnation in the relationship.
- It stimulates interest and helps people see reality.
- It's the root of change on a personal and social level.
- It helps establish identity on a personal and group level.
- It helps people learn new and better ways to respond.
- It helps build better and longer lasting relationships.
- It helps us know ourselves and others better.

For this we must be aware that the proper management of our emotions, and identifying the emotions of others, will be of great help. Otherwise, we'll won't develop the resources to resolve conflicts. To this I must also add the development of skills, such as knowing how to listen in an empathetic way and knowing how to communicate effectively. In a family, we must develop confidence to express our emotions and what we think about things.

6.2.2 Types of conflict

Experts often classify conflict in a variety of ways. For example:

- **Relationship conflicts** are due to strong false perceptions or stereotypes, little or no communication or repetitive negative behaviors. It's undoubtedly the reflection of a selfish attitude where one of the parties always wants to put their personal interests first and not those of the family.
- **Information conflicts** arise when people are misinformed or differ about what information is appropriate for making decisions, or by having discrete criteria for making decisions. We must learn to always see the whole picture, gathering the information that is correct and necessary.
- **Conflicts of interest** are caused by competition between incompatible needs, or at least so perceived. Conflict arises when one or more people think that part of their needs has to be sacrificed for other(s). We must learn to negotiate and make decisions that are best for the family and not just for one of its members. The Bible calls us to put the needs of others first.
- **Structural conflicts** are provoked by oppressive cultural structures, which are usually shaped by forces external to the people involved in the conflict. An example of this is the stereotype that the man can do whatever he wants, but not the woman.
- **Conflicts of values** are caused by incompatible belief systems. For example, if one person lives by biblical values and principles, but the other one doesn't, this makes it very difficult to negotiate.

There are also other typologies such as the one that classifies conflicts into:

- **Intrapersonal conflict** occurs within the person, caused by thoughts, emotions, values, or predispositions when they come into conflict internally. It's necessary to learn to put biblical principles first, even if we're offered apparent "great rewards" if we set them aside.
- **Interpersonal conflict** occurs between people. For example, between family members.
- **Intra-group conflict** occurs within a group. For example, conflicts that arise in a local Church.
- **Intergroup conflict** occurs between two groups. For example, between groups that are for or against something in particular, which gives rise to conflict. For example, groups for or against same-sex marriage.

I believe that most conflicts that occur in marriages or families are relationship conflicts caused by false perceptions or stereotypes, little or no communication, or repetitive negative behaviors. Therefore, it's urgent that as a church, we establish educational programs in which we encourage the family, starting with parents, to develop these skills.

6.2.3 Styles or ways of dealing with a conflict.

Each person has a way of dealing with conflict. They may not be necessarily bad or good since they may depend on particular circumstances. The important thing is to be aware that these forms or styles exist, and be flexible in modifying them if necessary.

- **Avoidance Style:** This is expressed by apathy, withdrawal, or indifference to the issue causing the conflict. In this style, there's no negotiation or resolution, so the conflict remains. It may be a sign that there's no interest in the relationship, and the results (in terms of changes to be made to end the conflict), are very few. He who avoids conflict denies the problem.
- **Accommodation Style:** The importance of the relationship is very high and the results are very low. One person continually yields/gives in so that the other person always wins (achieves the desired results) and is happy. This is done so as not to jeopardize the relationship. This style is suitable only when the issues are minor, such as choosing where we'll go out to eat, etc. But it's not healthy to apply it repetitively in matters of greater importance, which may even go against biblical principles.
- **Commitment Style:** One person cares about their interests, but compromises by also considering the interests of the other person. It seeks to reach the midpoint of the two positions. Without a doubt, it's a better way to resolve conflicts because each thinks about the needs of the other person. Each person gives in some so that everyone wins.
- **Collaboration Style:** In this style, the relationship between the participants, and the results that each one wants to obtain, matter greatly. It seeks to achieve the best possible end result for both. Conflict is not a problem, but an opportunity to grow. In addition to fear of God and love of neighbor, active and empathetic listening, healthy criticism, and other social skills that produce better relationships are also present.

6.2.4 What is required for a change of pattern in conflict resolution?

Experts in family counseling often recommend the following actions to change the way we approach conflict resolution:

1. Become aware of how you respond, how you feel and react, and what can help you resolve the conflict.
2. Be willing to explore other ways of approaching conflict, examine and modify your belief system if necessary, and be more open to criticism.
3. Develop your skills to effectively communicate feelings and needs, to listen effectively, and to choose the right approach to the situation. You may need to be more assertive.
4. Provide coherent support because goodwill is not enough. Understand that it's a continuous process. Give advice and recognize the other person's efforts.

6.2.5 Conditions for conflict resolution

Christian family experts recommend that the following conditions exist so that conflicts that arise can be resolved in the best way possible:

- a) **Harmony and unity:** Each family member should not seek their own benefit only, but seek to combine the efforts of all. Let's look at an example to illustrate this. Let's say that everyone wants to go for a walk, but there are several things that need to be done first. We can agree that everyone will help do what needs to be done, even if they aren't tasks that everyone is ordinarily responsible for doing, so we can all go on the walk together. (Psalm 133:1)
- b) **Love:** Agape love can transform a quarrelsome and divided family into a warm one. The presence of God, reflected in love, can resolve any conflict in a family, however serious it may be. Unfortunately, many people don't come from a comfortable environment where they feel loved and appreciated, where there's nothing to fear, and where problems are faced, rather than ignored or denied. Therefore, they tend to repeat that pattern when forming their own family.
Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.
(Rom.13:1-2)
- c) **Mutual aid:** A home where there's no harmony and love cannot generate mutual help for its members. But when the home is well formed, it will provide this support in every area of life: spiritual, moral, emotional, etc.
- d) **Presence of God:** Develop an environment conducive to God's presence. Remember that we are the Church, and the respect we feel for God in the church building must be present in the home as well. Let's make Him part of our family.

6.2.6 Final practical tips for resolving conflicts

As an addition to the lesson, we can consider the following practical tips that are good to consider when resolving conflicts.

- A. **Identify the problem:** What's going on? What's the root or cause of the problem?
- B. **Determine if it's actually a problem,** or something that just affects our ego or pride. Are we upset just because things aren't done the way we like?
- C. **Seek dialogue with those involved.** We must not ignore the problem or remain silent, but we must learn to dialogue. If we don't talk with each other about the problem, resentments accumulate that one day can explode like a pressure cooker. For example, if one of the children starts doing poorly in school, they shouldn't immediately be scolded, insulted, or blamed. What is appropriate is to first talk with the child to know what is possibly happening and to consider how to help him.

- D. ***Know how to distinguish between rules and habits when negotiating.*** For example, if you ask your children to brush their teeth three times a day, the time they brush may not be as important as the fact that they do it 3 times a day.
- E. ***Solutions must be proposed, considering the opinions of others.*** Unilateral decisions should never be made when possible.
- F. ***Evaluate the results on an ongoing basis.*** If satisfactory results aren't achieved, the matter must be reconsidered. This will involve modifying the initial decision made to avoid conflict. For example, if the problem is that you continue arriving late for work, and your initial solution had been to eat something on the way to work instead of having breakfast at home to save time, if you're still arriving late for work, possibly a new solution involves getting up earlier.
- G. ***Model what you're looking for.*** For example, if trying to reduce expenses, you must be the first to personally show how you're doing just that.
- H. ***Advise, support, guide*** and don't be harsh to anyone in the family for mistakes or weaknesses. Use the Bible as your instruction manual.
- I. ***Ask for advice from those who have overcome conflicts,*** from mature people with good testimonies. For example, if your conflict arises from having bad family finances, you can consult with Christian people who give evidence of having healthy finances.
- J. ***Be friendly.*** All conduct that produces differences and divisions must be eliminated. Parents, spouses, brothers and sisters should be friends with each other, treating each other with mercy and love.
- K. ***Never let go of God.*** Be aware that if you put God aside and trust more in your own resources and abilities, you'll be lost.

6.3 Conclusions

In many contexts, families haven't developed the necessary skills to resolve conflicts. I have observed it directly, even in pastoral families.

But in addition to this is the macho culture that to some degree is present even in Christian families. Evidence of this is the serious problem of domestic violence.

Big conflicts often happen by neglecting small things, or by letting many small things accumulate, until they form something big, or because something small falls on something very big, and that drop causes the glass to spill over. Or because we exaggerate things, and the situation doesn't merit such treatment. Today we can make Jesus part of our home by inviting Him into our hearts.

We have learned that there are several ways to approach conflict, and that not necessarily all of them are good or bad. It depends a lot on what causes the conflict and the circumstance that are being lived.

My commitment to God.

Application exercise

Show three examples of how you could approach conflict resolution in your family differently, applying what you saw in the lesson.

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Lesson 7. The Stewardship of Our Gifts

Bible passage: 1 Cor. 12:7–11

*⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.
... ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

Objective:

- **Contribute** to the development of the spiritual gifts that God has given to you, your spouse, and your children, to contribute to the building up of the **Kingdom of God**.
- **Develop** a positive family attitude towards the development and use of talents.

7.1 Introduction

As parents, we sometimes get upset with our children or our spouse because they don't contribute what they can to help the home function in the best way. We also tend to get upset when one of our children starts to do poorly in school. So, we usually say something like this: "I expect more of you because I know that you have the ability to do much better than this."

Now think of the church. Have you ever been part of, or visited, a church where it seemed that one person had to do almost everything? Unfortunately, such churches still exist, and it's usually the pastor who has to carry out most of the functions of the church.

Well, I hope you know that our Father God has given us spiritual abilities/gifts to contribute harmoniously to the growth of his Kingdom. He has made us capable of helping to grow his church, and perhaps on more than one occasion, He has exclaimed about us, "You can do better. I know the gifts and abilities that I gave you."

God designed a perfect plan for the Church to grow healthily, develop its vital functions correctly, and focus on fulfilling His mission. In this design, He enables us to be part of the body, that is the local Church, if we develop and fulfill the function that corresponds to us and our gifting. So how can we as a couple contribute to the development of those gifts?

7.2 Development

7.2.1 The Church that Jesus designed and for which he gave his life

Jesus designed the Church perfectly. In Eph. 1:11, it is stated that *"In him [Christ] we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."* R. Warren (2002) reminds us that God designed every feature of our body. He chose every detail. "He made your body to be just as He wanted it... he gave you all the natural talents you possess and the uniqueness of your personality." (Psalm 139:13-16)

Rick Warren (2002) identifies the following functions as an essential part of our purpose in life. The biblical basis is found in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. (Matt. 28:18-20; Matt. 12:37-39):

- Proclaim the message: Share with others the message of salvation in Christ.
- Educate: Teach biblical truths.
- Serve: Serve others in love.
- Fellowship: Be part of a community where you support each other.
- Worship: Worship God in every possible way, at all times.

Let's keep these in mind as we look at how everyone in your family is, or may be, participating meaningfully in at least one of these roles through the gifts God has given them.

7.2.2 The gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The word “gifts” (*charismata*) refers to abilities that the believer receives. They are not something natural, but something given by God Himself. M. Mastronardi (2010) tells us that:

- The gifts given by the Holy Spirit are vital to the fulfillment of the Mission.
- We receive these gifts as we come to a new life in Christ. It requires accepting Christ as Savior, having repented of our sins.
- There are a variety of gifts and ministries given by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8-11)
- Every believer has at least one gift. (1 Cor. 7:7; Eph 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10)
- These gifts are to be used to serve to build up the Body, equip the saints, and glorify God. (1 Cor.12:7)
- Love must always motivate us as we put them into action. (1 Cor. 13:1–13)
- Some gifts go together in the same person. For example, the gift of pastoring usually goes hand in hand with teaching and leadership. (Eph. 4:11, 1 Tim. 5:17)
- In the church or a particular ministry, Christian brothers and sisters with various gifts are needed.

7.2.3 There is a diversity of spiritual gifts

What are some of those spiritual gifts? There are several biblical passages that refer to spiritual gifts. The lists of gifts are concentrated in four passages of the New Testament:

- Romans 12:6-8
- 1 Corinthians 12:28
- 1 Corinthians 12:8-10
- Ephesians 4:11

How to know or reaffirm what gift (or gifts) that God has given you.

We are responsible before God to discover the gift(s) that He has given us. Earlier, we looked at the vital functions of the Church and briefly described the gifts. On that basis, think about what God wants for you, how He wants to use you in His Work.

Now we'll look at some actions that will help us discover what those gifts are: We must begin by praying for God to reveal it to us.

- We should deepen our study of God's Word on the subject of gifts, talents, and ministries. (1Cor. 12, Rom. 12, Eph 4). You can complement that study by consulting materials such as those mentioned in the bibliography.
- Next, we can take a self-test on the gifts to see what gifts we might have. (A spiritual gifts test is available here: <http://www.mesoamericaregion.org/en/package/discovering-your-spiritual-gifts/>)
- We must serve in a ministry associated with the gift(s) that we feel God has given us.
- Verify if God is showing you results that confirm that you have that gift(s).
- We'll feel spiritually strengthened by exercising those gifts, and we'll enjoy what we do for God.

7.2.4 How are each of us using our gifts?

James Goll (1986) recommends following these steps for God to use us in a great way through our spiritual gifts.

1. Choose God's decision for you. We must accept that the gift given by God to each of us is part of His sovereignty. Therefore, we should feel honored and privileged to be blessed with that gift that He has given us by His grace.
2. Stay open and receptive to God. After choosing God's will, we must actively seek and ask for what God has chosen for us, being willing to receive it. Believers can only produce the right environment (prayer, supplication, surrender, love...), but it is God who pours out his Holy Spirit. Jesus commanded them, *"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 1:4–5).
3. Have an attitude of worship and be available to God. Think about the way in which Jesus' disciples received his leading. They became available and responded when He called them and sent them to minister in His authority. After some time learning with Jesus, they were sent to the villages, and then they returned, talking about the victories that had been achieved (Luke 10:1–11, 17–19). Doing so brought them great joy, even in the midst of personal sacrifices and hardships.

A warning of the utmost importance.

The Word teaches us, through various parables told by Jesus, about the ways in which people respond to these spiritual gifts. Read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. Then, comment on what people do with the gifts:

Misuse	Correct use
a) They hide them. What will be the consequence of not using them?	b) They use them for God's glory.
c) They use them for their own glory.	d) They multiply the benefits.

7.2.5 How to contribute to the development and use of gifts in your family?

It's important that as a married couple and family, we encourage the development and use of gifts by each member of the family. Otherwise, we'll be failing to equip them to develop all of the potential that God has placed in each of them. As a couple, we can contribute in the following ways:

1. Teach them about the gifts: a) what they are, b) what they are for, c) how they are obtained, d) the types of gifts there are, etc. If any family member doesn't know their gift, help them discover it.
2. Let's encourage our children to put their spiritual gifts into practice. Remember that the family is a micro church. So the family is a good training ground for gifts. Start as parents. Then allow the children, if any, to practice them as well. Make the necessary observations in a kind tone, exercising constructive criticism. Consider the degree of development of the person. Don't forget to emphasize the good aspects and give words of encouragement.
3. As much as possible, and according to their age and development, support them with training that will help them develop their gifts. For example, if one has the gift of teaching, try to get him to start taking training courses for that.
4. Show them that we will be judged by Christ on how we have used these precious gifts. Explain the consequences of not using their gifts. Help them think about how God has blessed us through our spiritual gifts and all that He gives us. (Luke 12:47-48)
5. Remind them of the eternal reward Christ will give us for being good servants ... that includes putting our gifts into action. Help them develop a lifestyle of using their spiritual gifts for the building up of the church.
6. Take time at home to talk about how each family member is putting their gifts into practice. Allow them to express how they feel about doing so. Remind them that one must start from the basis of love of neighbor, and remember to give honor to God.
7. Remind them that all spiritual gifts should contribute to reaching the lost and building up the church. When necessary, help your children focus on not allowing pride, which the enemy wants to use to make us think that the results depend on us, take hold in their life.
8. Respect the diversity of gifts that God gives us. Be careful to avoid wanting your children to have the same gift, and consequently the same ministry, of father or mother. Let's respect God's sovereignty, even if He's calling one of the family to serve Him for full-time.

7.3 Conclusions

In His perfect design to fulfill His Mission and to grow us in the likeness of Christ, God has endowed every Christian with at least one spiritual gift. This is a gift given by grace, which He gives us through His Holy Spirit. It's our responsibility before God to discover and use the gift(s) He has given us. We must think about how we have been using these gifts, and what are the evidence and fruit that show they are being used correctly.

Spiritual gifts are given for building up the Church and fulfilling God's mission. It's not about seeing who has "the best gift." It's about being grateful to God for that gift and using it with passion, as is worthy of what Christ has done in our lives.

It should be noted that there are ministries that we must all participate in, even if we don't have that specific gift. For example, sharing the gospel is the task and privilege of every believer. In the same way, being compassionate is everyone's duty. Tithing is everyone's responsibility, etc.

Let's evaluate our spiritual state regarding the use of our spiritual gifts. Let's remember that we'll be held accountable for this before Christ. Already the parable of the talents has shown us what will happen if we use them correctly or not.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. If you already know your spiritual gifts, describe what they are and how God has confirmed this to you. If you don't know them yet, ask your teacher to give you a gift test (or go online to get the test mentioned earlier), and give you other directions to help you start working on them.

2. Reflect on the extent to which you have put your spiritual gifts into action. What are the fruit that have come from this? Are you satisfied with what has been achieved?

3. If every Christian's purpose is to grow in the likeness of Christ, and the Mission is to make Christlike disciples, explain how the exercise of spiritual gifts are reflected in your local Church?

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Lesson 8. Stewardship of our time. Let's prioritize.

Bible passage: **Read Ex 33:7-18.**

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." Exodus 33:15

Objective:

- **Reflect** on the urgent need to spend time each day with God, to know Him, to talk with Him, and to be strengthened by Him.

8.1 Introduction

"I don't have time ..." We have often deprived ourselves of spending time with our children. We don't play with them, we don't listen to them, we're not with them on special occasions and events like their birthday, their graduation, scoring their first goal, etc. They grow up without having someone to listen to them. It also happens with our spouse, for whom we have little time. How long has it been since you've been out alone for coffee, dinner, a date, or a walk in the park?

We also tend to have little time for ourselves, saying, when my vacation comes, I'll slow down and take care of this physical discomfort I have. The most dangerous thing is that this is often repeated in our relationship with God. At some point, we started taking time away from reading the Bible, praying, etc. Then, slowly but surely, everything else we do ceases to have the right direction that only God can give us.



Are we aware that the proportion of time we choose to allocate to each role or person speaks to how important it/they are to us? Is the time that we're spending with God, with family, etc. adequate? What can we do to have the right balance?

8.2 Development

8.2.1 Dangers of being very busy

By being too busy, we endanger our soul. In addition to eliminating bad habits, the challenge is to improve our spiritual life. The dangers are serious.

The first danger is that excessive activity can ruin our joy. The Word teaches us that we should be joyful at all times ... our lives should be marked by joy (Phil. 4:4). True, we've all experienced days or longer periods where everything seemed to go wrong. But even so, we must seek joy and rest in God. Last year during the pandemic, it seemed that the number of responsibilities for most of us multiplied. Many experienced anxiety. But in general, it's a pattern that often occurs in many people.

- We start participating in one or two big projects.
- Then we experience daily wear and tear.
- Then we despair of feeling peace again
- We promise that we'll change.

- After a few weeks we forget the purpose of not saturating ourselves with activities.
- Until the cycle repeats itself, and sometimes it can be worse.

The problem is that during that time, we lose joy. But not only that, we've also affected the joy of our family and those with whom we relate day by day. That is, we affect everyone's joy.

The second danger is that excessive activity can rob us of our hearts. In the parable about the sower (Mark 4:1-20), Jesus says that when the sower spread the seed:

- Some seeds fell by the roadside, and the birds devoured it.
- Other seeds fell on stony ground, grew fast, but dried up as the heat wave came.
- Others fell among thorns, which drowned out their fragile lives.

K. De Young (2013) observes that Jesus warns us of the problem of "the cares of this age" (Mark 4:19). These concerns are usually concerns such as:

- Making those home repairs/changes that you promised your spouse, preparing reports of your ministry, moving forward with your pending work, which you even take home, you promised your parents that you would go eat with them, etc....
- Helping your kids with their homework, Ah! And if they're students, surely they're behind on something. Making a list of what's needed for the pantry and restocking it. You've also thought about making some changes to the house.
- Add those to what you already know and have suffered. Life like this drowns out our spiritual life.

Jesus warns us that the Word can be swallowed up by the desires to possess things.

Possessions are not bad in themselves. The problem is everything we do to get them, take care of them and increase them. These things include house furniture, electronic gadgets, a plot of land, a house, a car, and ah ... fashionable clothing. They enslave us while we think we possess them. What Jesus is telling us is that the greatest threat to the gospel is exhaustion. Let's think about the following (De Young, 2013):

- How many great sermons that we've heard lose their power to transform our hearts because we're spending so much time on social media?
- How many times of private and family worship have been replaced by leisure time in front of the computer or television?

We need to guard our hearts. The seed of God's Word will not grow to bear fruit without pruning by rest, stillness, and calm. K. De Young

The third danger is that excessive activity can cover up the rottenness of our soul. That fast-paced rhythm can make us mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually ill. Our accelerated pace of life is a sign that the disease is already in us. He mentions that when spending time with old friends, he observed that each one talked about familiar issues: a) one struggles with discontent, b) another with discouragement, c) another with management of life issues, and d) another with tensions with co-workers. (Young, 2013)

We know there is so much to do, but we don't know what we should stop doing. If we continue having the same problems every year, maybe the real problem is within us. De Young (2013) invites us to think about the following:

- What does it say about me that I am frequently overloaded?
- What divine commandments am I ignoring that I should obey?
- What self-imposed tasks am I doing that I should ignore?
- What happens in my soul if excessive activity is my main challenge every year?

Excessive activity doesn't mean being a faithful or fruitful Christian. It just means you're too busy. And as with everyone, your joy, your heart, and your soul are in danger. We need God's Word to set us free, and biblical wisdom to get us on track. What we need is for the great Doctor to heal our overburdened souls. I wish we would take time for the appointment. K. De Young

8.2.2 *Diagnosis of "being very busy" and what to do about it*

A rhythm of life points to deeper problems: a) a constant desire to please people, b) an unrelenting ambition, and c) a discomfort of meaninglessness.

Diagnosis 1: You are surrounded by many expressions of pride

Pride takes on multiple faces, among them are (De Young, 2013):

- *Pleasing people.* We're trying to do a lot of things, to say yes to almost everything. We do it out of a desire of having everyone like us and from a fear of being disapproved of. This causes us to neglect our own needs and those of our family.
- *Possessions.* We occupy ourselves with acquiring more and more things. It's not bad having possessions; the problem comes when we take pride in them and stop depending on God.
- *Pats on the back.* Living for praise is seeking glory for oneself. "If I do this extra task, I'll be the hero."
- *Performance evaluation.* Many evaluate themselves with high marks because of overestimation. We say, "If I don't do this, no one will."
- *Prove who I am.* Some of us can't rest from trying to "prove something" to our parents, our former classmates, our friends, people at church, etc.
- *Sympathy.* Many of us like the empathy we receive for taking on so many tasks. People feel sorry for us seeing us so busy.
- *Position.* "I do so much because that's what people like me have to do."
- *Prestige.* "If I keep forcing myself, I'll finally be someone ... I'll be important at last." Don't forget that we were created for a purpose. Even if the world comes to recognize you, what good will it do us if we don't have time to know and walk with Christ?
- *Recognition.* You may have wondered: Why am I writing on FB or another social network? Who am I promoting, Christ or me? Today there are many addicts to "likes".

Of the possible problems that contribute to our frenetic pace of life, it is very likely that one of the most widespread is pride.

Mastering excessive activity is not as simple as saying no to everything and avoiding pleasing anyone. Applying it to real life is usually complex. Think about this (De Young, 2013):

- If I'm constantly trying to meet other people's expectations, does that mean I'm slavishly submissive or does it mean that I am a humble servant?
- Should I consider the favors that a friend has done for me when I consider the favor he wants me to do for him?
- When is it okay to sacrifice my comfort, or the comfort of those I love, in order to fulfill what I say?

De Young wonders: **Am I trying to do good or look good myself?"**

Ask yourself: Am I serving me or serving them? Saying yes to everything seems to show the desire to serve, but it is usually apparent. Remember that there are people with needs who always demand more and more. At first, we try to help, but if the demands grow, we despair and try to get away from that relationship. We can grow to resent that person we wanted to help. What should we do? What our friend needs, and the way we could help, is with an honest conversation about what we can and cannot do for him/her.

For example, we usually host many people in our home. But we can forget that hospitality is "to make your home a hospital. The idea is that friends, family, injured and tired people come to your home and are helped." (De Young, 2013) But sometimes it's a desperate experience for both parties. Problems arise with food, with children, or we overwhelm them with our problems. So, instead of encouraging them, we overwhelm them even more.

You cannot love and serve others without giving your time. So work hard; work much; work often. Just remember that it shouldn't be about you. Feed people, not your pride.

Diagnosis 2: You're trying to do what God doesn't expect you to do ... the terror of total obligation. During the pandemic, the church offered opportunities to further train us. I took advantage of several, but it was impossible to take advantage of all of them: a) Worship services, b) Prayer, c) conferences, etc. It was this difficulty of maintaining that rhythm that led many to experience anxiety. But is that what God wants? Let's look at some causes that can lead us to anxiety:

So many things to do. The Bible teaches us about relevant topics such as: the poor, marriage, evangelism, missions, justice, etc. But we tend to argue that what one does first should be for others. Many invite us to not give up on the effort to "go for more": pray more, give more, witness more, read the Bible more, serve more, etc. What should we do then? We just need to put the works of the flesh to death, die to self, and live for Christ. We should be concerned about:

- Spending close personal time with Jesus

- Discipling others and continuing to be disciplined.
- Sharing the Good News of Salvation in Christ.
- Serving in a ministry, according to the gifts the Holy Spirit has placed in you.

As a family, we seek to care for "widows and orphans"; we try to meet the needs of our marriage. We used to spend time with our daughters and watch over their spiritual lives when they lived with us. We serve as volunteers in Christian and theological education. But God may not be asking us (or you) to do something about every problem.

Living overwhelmed is not God's plan for our lives. As a couple, let's not allow ourselves to reach the brink of stress or bursting. De Young (2013) tells us: "We know that we can always pray more, give more, and evangelize more, so we get used to living in a state of disappointment with ourselves." We must understand that it's not a dilemma between "doing more or disobeying." He shares practical advice about not being invaded by "the terror of total obligation":

- I am not Christ.*** G. Hugenberger gave a sermon based on John the Baptist: "I confess that I am not the Christ." His simple point: "You're part of the wedding procession, but you aren't the groom. You aren't the Messiah, so don't try to be."
- The gospel is good news.*** Dearborn expresses that "The good news of Christ's death and resurrection has become bad news about the world's problems and how much there is still to be done to fix things. Duties, therefore, become serving more, giving more, caring more, doing more." **Dearborn reminds us that the gospel is good news of great joy, and that Jesus is the hope for the world.**
- "I care" is not the same as "having to do something about it".*** John Piper said, "*We must care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering.*" He didn't say that we should do something about every suffering ... that's impossible. But we should *care*. So, if we hear about extreme poverty, we can't be indifferent. But let's recognize that not all of us will care about every issue in the same way, but there are issues that should matter to all of us, motivating us to pray.
- We have different gifts and different callings.*** Every Christian should participate in the great commission, but not everyone is called to go to the nations. In my case, I write and teach, I try to do my best. Each person has their own gifts and calling. Let's be at peace with what we and others can do.
- Remember the church.*** The work we must all do is that of Christ, which is done through the church. It gathers to worship on Sundays and sends its members into their communities during the week to fulfill His work. As a community, we can do much more together than if we do it individually.

- f) **Jesus didn't do it all.** Jesus didn't fill every need. He left one city to preach in another. He took time away to pray. He got tired. He didn't interact with the vast majority of people on the planet. He spent thirty years preparing and only three years in ministry. He didn't try to do it all. But he did do everything God asked of him.
- g) **Take time to receive sanctifying grace.** Some Christians need to be shaken to get them out of their lethargy and serve in the Kingdom. But it's also true that there are many who are already very busy. We must remember that the mission is the work of Christ, and no one else can do it. It is up to us to always seek the fullness of the Spirit in order to be transformed into the image of Christ.

Diagnosis 3: You cannot serve others without the priorities of the real mission.

In Mark ("the gospel of action"), we see that Jesus was a very busy man. For three years, Jesus and his disciples were continually active. Sometimes Jesus was too busy to even eat, and his family thought he had gone mad (3:20-21). Jesus allowed crowds to come to Him. People sought him out, demanding his time and attention. Thus, he ministered, full of actions of service, out of love.

Although Jesus was continually performing acts of love, we never see Him being stressed, anxious, irritable, or distracted by minor things. When all of Capernaum was waiting for his healing touch, he went to a deserted place to pray. And when the disciples told Him to return to work, He went to another city to preach. Jesus knew the difference between the urgent and the important. He understood that all the good things he could do were not the things he was necessarily supposed to do.

Jesus' mission and ours. Someone might assume that Jesus had fewer pressures in his day than we do. But that's not true. He had disciples following him, crowds looking for him, and so many people demanding his attention. Still, he remained focused on the mission. Jesus knew his priorities and didn't run away from them. He didn't direct the agendas of others. Jesus preached and taught and loved people, with times of prayer, on the way to the cross. What are your priorities? What is your mission? We can talk about priorities such as:

1. Seeking to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus
2. Loving and guiding my family.
3. Faithfully sharing the Word of God.

Write down your mission from God, and let it serve you as you make decisions and manage your time. Your mission should be your guide in pursuing the important things, like your relationship with God, church, family and friends. To achieve this, De Young (2013) invites us to keep in mind the following truths:

1. **Set priorities because you can't do it all.** Time is a valuable and limited resource, so we must use it wisely. Jesus lived with incessant demands and incredible pressure. But He always knew that if He wanted to fulfill the purposes the Father had entrusted to Him, He must give up multiple good purposes that others might have for His life. For this he had to say no to many demands. We must proceed in the same way.

2. **Set priorities if you want to serve others more effectively.** You must dispense with the temporary, and this will allow you to focus on your ministry and have time for your family. Managing your time is about effectively serving others in what you are called to do.
3. **Allow others to set their own priorities.** Fighting hyperactivity is a community project. It isn't enough for us to set our priorities if we don't respect those that others set for themselves. Don't wait for the request to go out for lunch. Don't be sad when your "What do you think of this?" email doesn't receive a response. Don't be offended if your need isn't theirs.

8.3 Conclusions

Sometimes we don't seem to care what God wants for us; it only matters what we want and that our Lord accepts that part of us. We must learn to identify our priorities: God, family, health, ministry, friendships, etc. We must ask for wisdom to see what we should do and what we must decline, and how to best use our time.

We need to recognize if we have sinned by being too busy. We must establish a schedule where time is set aside for God, for our family, and for our ministry. The goal is to develop a lifestyle of intimacy with God. Let's do away with that which has taken us away from intimacy with God, with family, and with friends. We also need time to go and share the good news of grace with others.

Invest time in Prayer and Meditation on His Word, for through it you will grow spiritually, and your life will be more productive, bearing much fruit in Christ Jesus. (Rev. 3:20)

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. Of the activities that come up during the week, which could you delete or reduce to make the most of your time to accomplish God's mission for you?

2. Come up with a plan to spend more time with God for your spiritual growth.

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Lesson 9. **The stewardship of our finances and goods. Part 1.**

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 1 Corinthians. 4:2

Bible passage: **Matthew 25:20-21**

²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' ²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Objective:

- **Give** the financial area of your life to God so that He'll help you put it in order, according to His purpose for you.

9.1 Introduction

When we ask for advice on managing our finances, we usually hear advice such as: get an extra job, sell some of the things you own, stop spending on the superfluous, etc. The problem with these tips centers on the person having to "*do something*," but these don't go to the root of the cause that led them to that difficult economic situation in the first place. Thus, even if they manage to improve temporarily, in a short time the problems will return because the tips aren't attacking the root causes of the problems.

We must open our heart and analyze whether our decisions in our finances are a reflection of our obedience to God. We must focus on *being* like Christ.

Let's learn to trust God, starting from a change in our hearts that is reflected in new habits and attitudes. He wants to supply our needs, but he expects us to be faithful stewards. Jesus challenges us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, with the promise that He will provide what we need (Matt. 6:33). In this lesson, we'll learn biblical principles about stewardship of finances and goods.

9.2 Development

9.2.1 God is the owner of everything; we are only His stewards.

The Bible teaches us that God owns everything. A. Vogelabril (2018) mentions that to think like a steward, we must recognize that we don't own anything.

God owns everything and has entrusted resources, time, talent, and people for you to manage. As a steward, your role is to be true to His purposes. Regardless of whether you have a lot or a little, you should try to allow God to have full control over your financial decisions.

1. **God is the one who supplies our needs** (Phil. 4:19). Recognize that God takes care of us if we seek Him and walk according to His statutes. But it's necessary to be good stewards of what He puts in our hands.

2. ***Don't desire to get money inappropriately*** (Hab. 2:9). From passages like Exodus 18:21, God warns us about not wanting to make a profit at the expense of violating His principles. Sometimes we'll be tempted to participate in fraud at work, or to provide a service that doesn't match with what was promised, etc. That is sin and shows where our heart is. (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim. 3:3; 1 Peter 5:2).
3. ***Don't be a lover of yourself***. Paul describes the problems that arise when people love themselves and the delights of life more than God and others. Such people are proud and don't recognize that God owns everything and that they are only stewards of His possessions. They need a change of heart to understand and practice Christian stewardship. (2 Tim. 3:2–5)
4. ***Don't be distressed by money*** (Matt. 6:25-34). God asks us to trust that He will supply our needs. For this, He establishes as a condition that we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Make sure you are loving God with all your strength, with all your mind, with all your heart.

In the Bible we find that there are many issues associated with money, property, etc. There are more than 2,000 verses related to finances in the Bible (Doñé). This implies that God knows that if we don't have wise advice about it, we can find ourselves in serious problems in handling it. Consequently, when families begin to have problems in this area, we stop focusing on the Mission (if we didn't stop earlier) that God has entrusted to us. So, in those circumstances, the enemy has triumphed over us.

You must learn to have self-control and begin to make proper use of family finances. This will reduce the chances of problems in your family. In short, it's about making a paradigm shift: changing from focusing on doing certain things to try to have good finances, to becoming like Christ and then allowing that Christlikeness to be reflected in the management of our assets and finances.

"It's not about learning to do things to have good finances. It's about being transformed to be like Christ."

9.2.2 What's expected from the Christian regarding the handling of money?

Arielle Vogelabril (2018) helps us answer the question, What is stewardship? She writes: *"Stewardship is not about arranging your finances so that you can spend what you want. It's about arranging your life in such a way that God can use it as He wills."*

A steward is generally understood as the manager of another person's property, and for which he or she is accountable. In the following sections we'll study what is expected of a good steward.

9.2.3 Supply for the needs of the family (1 Tim. 5:8).

That is our first responsibility. While in the past this has often been seen as the responsibility of the man, we must remember the passage of the virtuous woman (Pr. 31:13,14,16), and we see how the woman often has to contribute to the family economy.

1. ***Don't be greedy*** (Prov. 28:22; Luke 12:15) but meet the needs of your family. Greed consists of a disorderly eagerness to possess and acquire wealth in order to treasure it. That denotes a serious spiritual problem. Distinguish wisely between being thrifty and being greedy. In Col. 2:5, greed is considered idolatry.
2. ***Learn to live with contentment*** (1 Tim. 6:7, 8). For many people, it's difficult to live with contentment. The Bible says that if we have clothes and food, we should thank God with contentment. This doesn't mean that we don't want to improve financially. What God asks is that we recognize His Lordship in our lives and focus first on heavenly goals. Discontent can lead you to live bitterly, to be easy prey for the enemy by making you think that God is unfair to you. Learn to be happy, even in the midst of having little.
3. ***Don't incur debts that you are unable to repay*** (Prov. 22:7). Debts represent a way of enslaving you to the company that lent the money to you. We must be wise to see how much we can afford before acquiring goods or services. Paul tells us in Rom. 13:8, "*owe no one anything.*" Also consider the high cost of interest charged on debt service.
4. ***Avoid being a compulsive shopper*** (Prov. 21:5). We must be very cautious in our purchases. As far as possible, larger purchases such as appliances, etc. should be planned for in advance. Let's be careful not to be irrational when wanting to buy something just because there are various promotions such as: *months without interest*, "*night sales*," "*no payments for three months*," etc. Look for discounts. Get at least three quotes on what you want to buy. Sellers try to get you to buy what you didn't plan on buying, what you don't need, or something at a higher price, by appealing to your emotions.
5. ***Don't love money*** (1 Tim. 6:10). When we love money, we're at great risk of losing our salvation. We lose our focus on seeking God and concentrate more on making more money, even if we already have enough. (Ecclesiastes 5:12) The desire to make more money will dominate us and we'll often violate other principles to earn more. We cannot serve God and money at the same time.
6. ***Educate your family about the value of money and its proper use.*** Even children and adolescents can learn to be wise stewards.
 - a. Teach them that money is earned and can be multiplied, wasted, or lost.
 - b. Make sure they always have a savings account. Ask them to contribute a set amount per week if possible.
 - c. Let them make mistakes and motivate them to do better.
 - d. Help them distinguish between luxuries and priorities.
 - e. Guide them as to when, how, and with whom they should negotiate/buy.
 - f. Teach them by example what is the middle ground between humbleness and greed.
 - g. Tell them that they will be able to achieve their goals, God willing, as they strive in this area of financial management.

9.2.4 Discover how the enemy of your finances operates.

Satan is very skilled and will always try to get us to take our focus away from what God wants for our lives. His only intention is to divert us from what God asks of us and what He wants to do in and through us.

By studying these principles, you'll realize that you've possibly violated at least one of them. What the enemy seeks is that we link one by one the thoughts that distance us from God. To explain myself better, let me present to you the following explanation given by Paul David Tripp (2014: 158-159).

For Tripp, there are four things that work together to get us to love money, which goes against what God has asked of us. They are illustrated in Figure 9.2.4.1. Let's look at a brief description of each one (Tripp, 2014).

- 1) Being resentful, thinking we deserve more than we have
- 2) Thinking that there are certain things that we need to live well, when in reality they aren't true needs. This will lead us to do all we can to meet those supposed needs. Thus, we'll be buying a state-of-the-art cell phone, a new luxury car, or maybe buying a lot of branded clothes that aren't really necessary. Tripp calls them "*wants*" because they aren't authentic needs.
- 3) Then comes discontent. This arises when I don't appreciate what I have, since I don't have what I think I need (which in reality are only "*wants*"). That discontent will lead me to look for ways to have more and more. My tendency will be to spend (often on credit) to satisfy my discontentment. But spending more is not going to satisfy my problem long term.
- 4) The last factor will be that "*I start being envious.*" Now:
 - I'm ungrateful and I'm convinced that I deserve more.
 - There are things that, according to me, I need and don't have.
 - That will make me unhappy.
 - So I will begin to envy what others have.

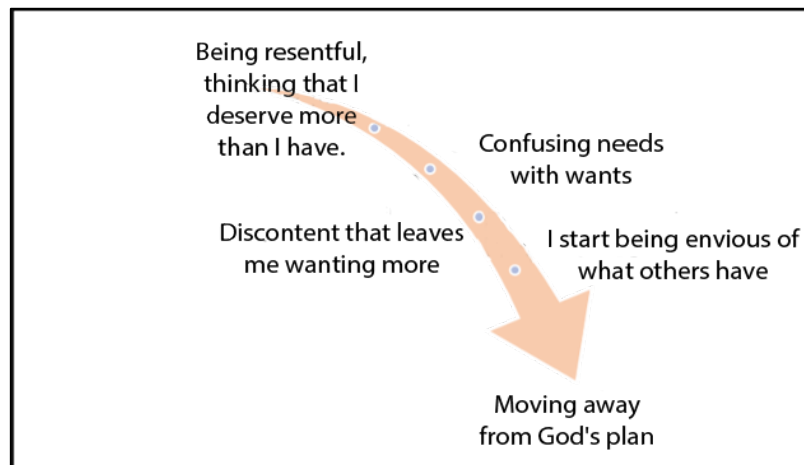


Figure 9.2.4.1 The Enemy's Plan to Turn Me Away from God

This will make me focus on myself and use my money foolishly. My life will focus on getting money, money and more money. With this explanation that Tripp (2014) gives us, we can see that indeed, money problems clearly show what is in my heart.

9.3 Conclusions

God calls us to be irreproachable administrators; we must be good stewards. This implies supplying for the needs of our home first.

We have learned or remembered some biblical principles that will help us grow in that direction. We emphasized that we must focus on true transformational changes, and only the Holy Spirit can do that in us. This is in contrast to following "a series of practical steps" on the healthy management of our finances.

Very interesting and revealing was to study, according to Tripp, the enemy's ***Plan to turn me away from God.*** I hope this way of explaining the enemy's trap has been of great help for you as it was for me. This outline gives us a more comprehensive picture of how Satan acts in the aspect of finance. Not being alert about this can lead to financial slavery that will greatly alienate us from God's purpose for our lives.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. What does it mean to you that the Lord owns all things?

2. How does managing your financial resources make you a better steward?

3. Do you believe that the management of our finances and possessions reflects the condition of our spiritual life? Explain what you think in your own words.

Bibliographic references.

Available after chapter 10.

Lesson 10. **The stewardship of our finances and goods. Part 2.**

No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own. Acts 4:32

Bible: Read **2 Cor. 8:1-9**

Objectives:

- **Commit ourselves** to God to give our tithes and offerings to sustain God's Work to reach and disciple the lost, as well as to help others.

10.1 Introduction

In this lesson, we'll continue learning about managing our finances. Remember that the emphasis is on learning to be like Christ rather than learning to "do things." That is, we seek first for the Holy Spirit to transform us, and then to do what God asks of us. In this way, we'll have a greater understanding of God's leading, and a greater conviction in heeding them.

We said in the previous lesson that we must learn to trust God, starting from a change in our hearts that is reflected in new habits and attitudes. Now we're going to focus on what it means to give tithes and offerings generously as God provides for us. For this, we'll see the corresponding biblical foundations and be able to answer the questions that arise in this regard.

10.2 Development

10.2.1 Tithes and Offerings

Tithing was an obligation in the Old Testament (OT). The Israelites knew that tithing was a mandate ... God commanded them to do so. The consequences of not doing so were severe. But when they tithed, the people could always see how God helped them.

- The Bible mentions tithing first in relation to Abram. (Gen. 14:20)
- Jacob also offered his tithe. (Genesis 28:22)
- The law of Moses confirms that tithing was not a new law, but something well established. For him, tithing was something consecrated to God, representing a rescue or substitution for something else offered to God.

God has established that as stewards of what He gives us, we are to set aside 10% to cover the necessary expenses of the church, such as:

- Providing for the support of the pastor(s) (Matt. 10:10; 1. Cor. 9:1-15).
- Covering the expenses of ministries such as worship services and discipleship.
- Paying for basic services such as water, electricity, telephone, internet, etc.
- Making improvements to the facilities.
- Buying necessary equipment such as musical instruments, furniture, etc.

Remember that it's about refocusing on being Christ's. Our tithing actually becomes a test of our love for God, and is also one of the many ways we have to worship Him. Tithing is also an act of faith because, although our family resources are limited, we're showing that we believe that God will meet our needs as we faithfully steward what he has provided.

Unfortunately, on many occasions we look for excuses not to tithe. Among them are the following:

- ***“It doesn’t fit into my family budget because I earn so little.”*** Jesus invites us to trust in God.
But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)
- Some who are engaged in sales declare, ***“there are almost no sales now.”***
“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” (Malachi 3:10)
- ***“The current situation is one of crisis, and I prefer to save for future emergencies.”***
In various passages of the O.T. and N.T. we’re exhorted to not put our trust in riches. (Prov. 11:28; Jer. 49:4; 1 Tim. 6:17)
- ***“I don’t like the way that the church uses the money that I give.”*** In many cases, that’s just an excuse. If you have a problem with how money is spent in the church, talk to the treasurer or pastor. In many cases, that will solve the doubts that we actually have about it.
- ***“Tithing only applied to those in the Old Testament times.”*** Notice that Abraham and Jacob tithed before the law of Moses was in effect. Moreover, in Matthew 23:23, Jesus corroborated the action of the Pharisees in tithing, even though He condemned their motives. Let’s look at the last part of the verse that says, *“You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”* Jesus doesn’t say that there’s no need to tithe; what he says is that we must tithe ***and*** do works of mercy.

These and other excuses aren’t sufficient reasons to not tithe or give offerings. Consider the problems we face in not tithing. According to Malachi 3:10, when we don’t tithe:

- We aren’t being obedient to God.
- We put our faith in riches before God.
- We’re stealing from God.
- We’re consequently at fault before God and risk losing all the beautiful promises in Christ.

10.2.2 Practical tips for role modeling

Give as much as you can. In doing so, let’s consider the rules set forth by John Wesley:

- a) Give God His due.
- b) Give for the sustenance of the Work of God.
- c) Give for the needs of others.

1. Fulfill our tithes and offerings (Mal. 3:8).

God has established that as stewards of what He gives us, we must set aside 10% to cover the necessary expenses that are generated in the church. It's intended for the support of the pastor (Matt. 10:10; 1 Cor. 9:1-15), to cover expenses from ministries such as preaching and discipleship, payment for basic services such as water, electricity, telephone, etc., making improvements to the facilities, as well as acquiring necessary equipment such as musical instruments, furniture, etc.

Since this is about refocusing on what we should be, it's important that our tithing is a result of our love for God and a way to worship Him. It's also an act of faith because, although our family resources are scarce, we're showing that we believe that He'll meet our needs.

2. Contribute to the ministry (1 Cor. 6:2).

There are other offerings that go to various funds such as evangelism, support for missionaries, support for the construction of churches and pastoral houses, etc. There are also some for disaster relief, sponsoring children, among others. Each person will be able to contribute so that the Kingdom of God continues to spread. Jesus helps us see that, even if there is little to give, He sees our hearts more than how much we give (Mk 12:43,44).

3. Be generous in supplying for the needs of others (Lk 6:38).

The Bible teaches us that out of our love for God and neighbor, we're to meet the needs of others. Jesus challenges us to give abundantly and joyfully (2 Cor. 9:7). The early church showed its love by supplying for the needs of the brethren (Acts 4:32-37). 1 John 1:17 teaches us that sharing with others is a sign of love.

Our actions of love in meeting the needs of unsaved people will speak to their hearts and perhaps draw them to God. John Wesley insisted that our holiness is relational, and must be shown in daily action to others, and concretized in actions that show our love for our neighbor. This will involve helping others with their needs.

"The Methodists gave to the poor, lived with the poor, and gave preference to the poor" (LeClerk, 2002).

"And no one claimed that any of their possessions was their own" (Acts 4:32). This is to be the attitude of every person who has surrendered completely to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Because of this attitude, when there's a need inside or outside the church, Christians look for ways to help. God lives in them, working through them for His glory, because they make all they have available to the One who has entrusted their things to them.

Principles on giving as an example of sowing

One of the ways the Bible describes how we receive blessings by blessing others is through the example of sowing and harvesting. There are various truths about sowing that you and I should consider when giving.

- God provides for the sowing (2 Cor. 9:10).
- We don't sow and harvest on the same day. (Eccl. 3:1)
- The amount of fruit to be obtained depends on the amount sown. (Luke 6:38)

- The enemy doesn't like us to sow. (2 Cor. 9:10, 11)
- More is received than is harvested. (Gen. 26:12)
- Sowing costs something. (Ps. 126:5-6)

10.2.3 What do you have in your hands? Never say nothing.

Many Christians believe that since they possess few things and resources, God won't be able to do anything through them. They develop a pessimistic or scarcity mentality. The Bible points to it as a "fortress" (or barrier) that puts the enemy in our mind and turns us away from God. Think of some instances where God used the "little" that someone thought they had.

- God chose Moses to deliver His people from the oppression of the Egyptians. Moses didn't know what would happen when he confronted the mighty Pharaoh. When he asked God for help, God asked him, *"What do you have in your hand?"* Moses answered, *"a rod."* When Pharaoh eventually let the people go, Moses marched with them. Then they came to the Red Sea, and behind him was Pharaoh with his army. God commanded him to hold the rod over the sea. That was enough to move forward. (Ex. 14:1-28).
- When Jesus asked his disciples to feed the crowds, they didn't know how to do it. They only had five loaves and two small fish from a boy's lunch. For Jesus, that was enough. He consecrated it to the Father, and then they were able to feed all the people. (John 6:9)
- When David confronted the giant Goliath who made fun of the people of Israel and mocked God, he used only his slingshot and a few stones to defeat him. (1 Samuel 17:40)

Let's learn to do the same. What we have at hand, however minimal it may seem, let's consecrate it to God. Learn to love Him, fear Him, obey His statutes, and serve Him. Then you will be able to see the fulfillment of the promises he has for his children.

10.3 Conclusions

God has given us biblical principles to ease our path to the ultimate goal, which is the heavenly Kingdom of God. Let's not lose focus on it. Learn and reproduce financial education, starting at home, continuing with your extended family. We recognize that God is the owner of everything. Never forget that God is sovereign. Maybe you've made mistakes in your management of finances in the past, and if so, you must apologize for it individually and to your family.

Let's reflect on the fact that since God gave us His son, don't you think He'll supply everything we need? Romans 8:32 states:

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

It's time to grow to another level of faith and experience His provision. I recommend you read Malachi 3:10, which gives us a splendid picture about faithfulness in finances. What would God do if His people tithed? Discuss it in the group.

Don't give up but continue to pray in a great way so that in His mercy, He will give us a new way to honor Him ... a family supported by the proper management of our finances.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. Do you tithe? Do you think you should? Explain what you think in your own words.

2. What adjustments should you make so that you carry through on God's call for you to tithe?

3. Do you think that people with limited resources should tithe? Explain what you think in your own words.

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Lesson 11. Preparation of a family budget.

Bible: **Luke 14:28**

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?

Objectives:

- **Develop** a list of your family's monthly expenses and income.
- **Estimate** all the assets that the family owns, as well as its liabilities (or debts).
- **Develop** a realistic family budget.

11.1 Introduction

In Matthew 13:44-46, Jesus gives us two brief parables that help us see the value of the Kingdom of God and the joy of finding it. In the first, Jesus narrates the actions of the man who found a buried treasure. In the other parable, He described what a merchant did when he found a pearl of precious price. What Jesus is highlighting here is the incalculable value of the Kingdom of God and what we must be willing to do for it (Amsterdam, 2015).

Now let's reflect **on how much the Kingdom of God is worth to us**. How much do we value Jesus' sacrifice, through which we were gracefully granted forgiveness of our sins? If it is incredibly valuable, let's now think about what we're willing to do to get it.

Are we willing to acknowledge that we haven't always valued the Kingdom of God? Have you ever thought that you deserve to have more than God has given you? If so, can you recognize that this is a symptom that something is wrong with your heart?

11.2 Development

11.2.1 Importance of having a family budget.

There are many advantages of making a family budget. The following are those highlighted by John Maxwell, S. Sánchez, and Arellano (2017). A family budget helps you:

- Make decisions about where your money should go.
- Identify ways to reduce expenses.
- Determine the actions to be carried out to adjust to the prepared budget.
- See when you are at risk of a crisis and thus take the necessary measures to avoid it.
- See how to reduce debts and thereby stop paying high interest.
- Set family goals and analyze if there are deviations from those purposes.
- Discipline yourselves and thus avoid new unnecessary debts.

11.2.2 Making a family budget.

To make a family budget, it's always advisable that all the members of the family participate in its creation. Consider the following steps:

Step 1. **Set goals.** Include the costs of the birth of children, their education, their university education, travel, participation in ministries, vacations, etc. For example, if your children are going to start studying in high school in two years, you can start saving now. The total cost of studies should be investigated. Then calculate how much you should save each month for that purpose.

Step 2. Determine your family income. Consider the income of each adult. Include salaries, bonuses, and any regular or extraordinary income.

Step 3. Estimate all family expenses. Remember that some expenses are due only one or more times a year, but not every month. Examples of this are insurance payments, taxes, vehicle duties, etc. Subsection 11.2.3.2 describes in detail the various items. It's also illustrated with an example. Remember that it's about seeing everything from God's perspective. Therefore, although at first it costs us time and effort, we must be aware that God asks us for those things that are for our own good.

Step 4. Compare your income and expenses. You will notice if your income is greater than your expenses, which is how it should be. But if your family expenses exceed your income, then you have to think about how to reduce expenses, improve your income, or alternative actions such as selling something that represents a financial burden to you, such as a car you can do without.

Step 5. Determine the budget your family needs. You can make a projection for the next three months to see how the adjustments you make with your family work out. It's recommended that to do this, spreadsheets such as Excel be used. There are many on the internet. We suggest using a simple one to start this type of exercise. If you don't have access to a computer, please don't be distressed. The important thing is to start writing down your income and expenses, which you can also do manually if need be. You can start off using percentages of your income, or specific amounts.

Step 6. Evaluate how the budget is being met. Do this monthly to see if you're achieving what was planned. Adjustments must be made as necessary. At first it's very common to see some variations with respect to the estimated amounts because you're just developing the necessary habits to carry out good stewardship of your finances.

Additionally, it's good each year to make a comparative table of what you own (assets) and what you owe (liabilities). It's best that this balance improves every year, although in the beginning it may be negative.

Example 11.2.1 Consider a family's ratio of assets to liabilities. These will be compared in two different years to assess whether the family's financial condition has improved. Table 11.3.1 shows an example of the family's assets. Then in Table 11.3.2, you'll see their liabilities.

Table 11.3.1 List of Family Properties (Assets)

Assets (assets)	Year 2016	Year 2019
House Value	\$70,000	\$78,000
Resale value of the Car	\$12,000	\$9,000
House Furniture	\$4,800	\$2,400
Savings in the bank	\$1,200	\$1,800
Total	\$88,000	\$91,200

Table 11.3.2 **Ratio of family debts (liabilities)**

Liabilities	Year 2016	Year 2019
House Debt	\$64,000	\$58,600
Car Debt	\$9,000	\$3,000
Credit Card Debt 1	\$4,000	\$5,000
Credit Card Debt 2	\$2,000	\$1,200
Pawn shop	\$1,500	\$2,500
Department store debt	\$1,500	\$2,000
Personal loan	\$2,500	\$4,000
Total	\$84,500	\$76,300

Analysis of the status: Note that when subtracting the liabilities from the assets of the year 2016, the difference is (+) \$3,500, while for 2019 that difference is (+) \$14,900. As the positive balance increases, it indicates improvement in the financial health of the family. In addition to the difference being positive, if you had to sell everything, you could cancel out the debt. Our goal must be a positive balance. It should be clarified that it's recommended not to include the house furniture since it's usually not something that you're going to sell. Determine the balance with the value of the furniture excluded.

11.2.3 Estimate of current income and expenditure

11.2.3.1 Items to consider in income

All types of income that the family has during the year must be included. Listed below are the most common types.

- *Wages.* It's the payment we receive for our work done.
- *Profits from selling products or providing services.*
- *Rent that you receive.* For example, if you have a piece of land, a house, etc. and you receive rent for it, you should include that into your income.
- *Bonuses given to you.* Productivity bonuses, for years of service, etc.
- *Donations received.* Gifts receive out of gratitude, etc.

Example 11.2.2

A family made up only of the couple want to get their finances in order. They have been married for a year, and don't have plans for having children any time soon. The husband is finishing university studies and is also working. Table 5.4.1 shows their income. Note that both the ordinary income of each month and the extraordinary income for vacations, bonuses, etc. are recorded.

Table 11.3.3 **Family Income**

Revenue	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Husband's salary	\$1200	\$1200	\$1200	\$1200	\$1200
Wife's salary	\$1500	\$1500	\$1500	\$1500	\$1500
Vacation	-	-	\$474	-	-
Bonuses	-	-	-	\$1000	-
Other Income	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20
Total for the month	\$2720	\$2720	\$3194	\$3720	\$2720

11.2.3.2 Items to consider in expenditures

To do this exercise, it's recommended that you make up a list of the monthly expenses that your family has had in recent months. You can classify expenses into items or categories. Don't hesitate to make the necessary adjustments for your particular case.

If you wish, you can add line items that aren't included in the example. To keep good control of expenses, as well as your income, it's important that you have a record sheet. On it you must write down your income and expenses every time you have them, even daily. Describe well what each line item corresponds to. Here's an example.

Table 11.3.4 Categories proposed to record expenditures

Category	
I. Food and beverages	
II. Transportation: car purchase, maintenance, accessories, vehicle services, insurance	
III. Education: tuition costs, educational items	
IV. Housing, electricity, water, utilities	
V. Personal care, accessories and personal effects and other miscellaneous expenses	
VI. Cleaning items and services, house care, household goods and furniture, glassware, household utensils, etc.	
VII. Clothing and footwear	
VIII. Insurance	
IX. Healthcare	
X. Tithe and offerings	
XI. Help: ministries, other people, etc.	
XII. Savings and Investments: Retirement, long term, short term	
XIII. Recreation: recreational items and leisure expenses	
Total	

Example 11.2.3

A family is trying to get their expenses in order. To do this, they made a record of each expenditure day by day during the past month. These are summarized in Table 11.3.5. If you have a record of several months, you can determine the average amount that's spent on each category each month. The following report was prepared and shown in Table 11.3.6

Table 11.3.5 Example of a monthly Record of Expenditures for a Family

Nature	Category	Description	Monthly amount
Expenses	Home	Rent	\$250
Expenses	Home	Electricity	\$17
Expenses	Home	Water	\$15
Expenses	Home	Gas	\$8
Expenses	Home	Internet	\$38
Expenses	Home	Cable	\$60
Expenses	Transport	Car payment	\$64
Expenses	Transport	Petrol	\$231
Expenses	Transport	Car Maintenance	\$20
Expenses	Transport	Car insurance	\$83
Expenses	Food	Eating out	\$300
Expenses	Food	Groceries	\$550
Expenses	Recreation	Cell phone	\$50
Expenses	Recreation	Gifts	\$62
Expenses	Recreation	Going out	\$100
Expenses	Recreation	Travel	\$83
Expenses	Care and Hygiene	Medical Expenses	\$55

Expenses	Care and Hygiene	Clothes and Beauty	\$50
Expenses	Tithes & offerings	Tithe	\$130
Expenses	Savings and Investments	Savings	\$130
Expenses	Savings and Investments	Retirement	\$130
Expenses	Education	Tuition	\$260
Expenses	Education	School fees	\$5
Expenses	Education	Extra Expenses	\$5
Expenses	Pets	Food	\$25
Expenses	Pets	Medical Expenses	\$8
Expenses	Pets	Misc. expenses	\$10
		Total	\$2739

Table 11.3.6 Example of a family's average monthly expenditures

Expenses	January	February	March	April	May
Home	\$388	\$363	\$433	\$363	\$413
Transport	\$295	\$395	\$298	\$305	\$545
Food	\$850	\$850	\$850	\$850	\$850
Recreation and others	\$150	\$150	\$150	\$150	\$300
Personal care	-	\$110	\$150	\$110	-
Tithes and Offerings	\$270	\$270	\$300	\$270	\$280
Savings and Investments	\$270	\$270	\$270	\$270	\$270
Education	\$280	\$260	\$260	\$280	\$280
Pets	\$50	\$60	\$40	\$10	\$60
Total	\$2,553	\$2,728	\$2,751	\$2,608	\$2,998

This information can now be used to set a monthly budget amount for each category. The total of your expenses cannot be more than the total of your income. Here is an example: Table 11.3.6

Income	\$2,720
Expenses	
Home	\$390
Transport	\$300
Food	\$800
Recreation	\$150
Personal care	\$90
Tithes and Offerings (10% + offerings)	\$290
Savings and Investments (at least 10% if possible)	\$270
Education	\$280
Pets	\$50
Contingency/Emergency	\$30
Credit card payment/debt payment	\$70
Total Expenses	\$2,720

After setting your budget, you'll need to continue keeping track of your expenses to assure that you are not over-spending in any category. If you need to spend more in one category for a month, you'll need to reduce the amount that you spend in that category in the months prior so that you'll have a surplus in that category for your higher expenditure. Or, you can reduce your spending in another category for that month to make up the difference.

11.2.4 Common problems in preparing the family budget

11.2.4.1 Problems determining income

- By having your own business, daily sales are unknown. What is suggested is to have data from several months since this allows you to determine the trends (weekly, monthly, quarterly, seasonal) of sales.
- Lack of discipline in recording revenue and sales. It's important that you start developing this habit now.
- Not knowing the benefits you're entitled to as an employee (when it's given by the company in accordance with its policies), like health care, contributions to a retirement account, bonuses, etc.
- Not registering extraordinary income such as bonuses, gifts, etc.

11.2.4.2 Problems determining expenditures

- Expenses that are not payable every month. Don't forget to budget for them (taxes, etc.)
- Forgetting to include maintenance costs in the budget. In the long run, it's cheaper to invest in maintenance than to wait for something to break (like your car, etc.).
- Not budgeting for extraordinary expenses for which we aren't prepared (contingencies). You should budget money in a savings account or emergency account for these expenses.
- One spouse hiding expenses that he/she hasn't told the other spouse about to avoid an argument. For example, one has been giving a monthly allowance to their mother, etc.
- Having no idea how much interest you pay on every debt you have.
- Not knowing exactly how much you owe and to whom.

11.2.5. How to interpret the results of family assets

How to interpret the results of the balance sheet when comparing income and expenses?

We must compare our monthly or weekly income and expenses.

- a) If your expenses are less than your income, there is a very good starting point
- b) If the difference between your income and expenses is close to zero, small changes must be made to start having more money available to save, give, etc.
- c) If what you spend is greater than your income, there are serious problems. There is much to correct. With God's help and a willingness to change, it can be achieved.

The changes will involve various types of actions such as:

- Reducing necessary expenses
- Minimizing unnecessary expenses
- Increasing revenue
- Diversifying our sources of income

11.3 Conclusions

If you want to take control of your finances, you must make, and stick to, a family budget. Basically, it's about keeping track of your income and expenses, and making sure your expenses aren't more than your income. No doubt, at the beginning it will be difficult for you to do everything perfectly. In fact, we've seen many causes, barriers and pretexts for not keeping records of our income and expenses.

The budget will serve as a basis to see if we earn less than we spend, which results in debt. From that you'll make wise decisions to go on the right path.

Remember that we aren't looking for "recipes" on what to do to manage our finances. What we seek first of all is to be transformed so that God will help us direct ourselves to the fulfillment of the purpose He has for our lives.

Although mentioned at the end, the basis of being able to have a healthy control of our finances is to put everything in the hands of our God. We must go to Him in prayer and ask Him to transform and heal our hearts, and consequently our finances.

While that is happening, let's be patient and exercise our faith that if we are faithful in tithing, giving offerings, and healthily managing our finances, He will supply us with everything we need.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. Make the following for your family:
 - (a) A detailed description of all the expenditures for one month
 - (b) A detailed description of one month's income

2. Try to see what amount goes to each item of expenses per month. Make observations and comments on how you think you are using your finances.

3. Contrast your income against your family expenses. What situation are you in? Is your income more than your expenditures, or are your expenses more than your income? From this, what changes do you think should be made?

Activity to reflect (individual or team).

Analyze Table 11.3.5 and start writing down all the possible changes you would make to save on that family's expenses. Also, what changes would you make to the sample budget for the family (Remember that in Table 11.3.3 we presented the income that the family receives).

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Lesson 12. **Serving together as a family**

Bible: **Joshua 24:14-15**

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Objective:

- **To Make** the decision to serve God together as a family.
- **To Serve** in the ministries your local church already has.
- **To Seek** new ways to serve as a family in God's work.

12.1 Introduction

Spiritual formation cannot be complete without service. Can you imagine Jesus and his disciples practicing the various spiritual disciplines without going to serve their neighbors? I don't think anyone with any knowledge about Jesus' heart can imagine such a scene.

Therefore, we must all intentionally and systematically seek to involve ourselves in serving. If we're each already serving in a ministry, let's thank God for it. If we aren't doing this, we should encourage each other to find a place to serve and start serving.

I can testify that one of the things that we as a family have enjoyed and have very much etched in our minds and hearts has been when we have served as a family in God's work. We thank God.

12.2 Development

12.2.1 Some realities in our church today

The Bible teaches that faith without works is dead. As James 2:14-17 explains, it's not works that justify us, but they are evidence that we love Christ and seek to be like Him. Surely, he observed something that led him to exhort the Jews to "*get to work.*"

How can a church fulfill the Great Commission if its members don't use their gifts in God's service? This is serious. We need to honestly think about the extent to which our local church is serving in the Kingdom. Is that service reflected in the numerical and spiritual growth of the church? Is it reflected in the belief by the community that the church is a source of blessing to them?

There will be various responses to this. There are churches very committed to God which are serving Him in a great way. Others may need to hear what Jesus told the church in Ephesus, "*You have left your first love*" (Ephesians 2:4). Years earlier, Paul had recognized the great work being done by the brothers and sisters of Ephesus.

² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are

not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. ⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. (Revelation 2:2-4)

In some ways, this is what is happening today in some churches that have had low growth. A rift has been created with this generation of young people, causing many young people to leave the church. In other cases, the church was not able to attract young people of the new generations.

12.2.2 Characteristics of Christian service.

It's of the utmost importance to keep principles in mind when planning to serve in God's Work. These principles are essential if what we seek in serving is for the Holy Spirit to continue to transform us into the likeness of Christ. Here are some of them:

1. Even though we love, serve, and give to others, our love for Jesus must be above all else; only in this way can we love others. (Rev. 2:4)
2. It takes a true experience of salvation, the filling of the Holy Spirit, and a life hidden with Christ in God in order to serve Him correctly. *I never met you.*
3. In serving, we must seek to give Christ the honor (John 7:18).
4. We must serve without expecting anything in return. Sometimes our serving can even result in us being hurt or without food for ourselves. (1 Cor. 4:11-13; 9:4-7)
5. We can all serve, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or age. Our attitude and the gifts that God has bestowed upon us are the key.
6. Serving doesn't necessarily involve giving money or things, but if that's what's needed, and it's in your ability to give, do it.
7. You must use your Spiritual Gifts and talents. Remember that one day we'll be held accountable for what we did or didn't do with them.
8. There are countless opportunities to serve out of our love for Christ and neighbor.
9. Serving has its reward. *"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* (1 Corinthians 15:58).
10. God is with us when we serve Him (1 Chron. 28:20).

12.2.3 Practical recommendations for serving.

In order for serving as a family to become an experience that marks the life of each member in a positive way, it's important that you consider some practical recommendations. Listed below are some of them:

1. If any of your children are already serving in a church ministry, don't take them away from it if they are doing well.
2. Try to know the spiritual gift or gifts that God has given to each member of your family. When choosing which area to serve in as a family, look for areas of service that match up best with the gift(s) that each one has.
3. Be open as parents to listening to your children's opinions about possible areas in which your family can serve.
4. Prioritize ministries that your local church already has in place.

5. Consider areas of opportunity associated with activities you already do on a day-to-day basis. For example, your son may want to form a Bible study group at his or her university, with the intention of sharing the gospel with other young people.
6. Don't forget your home as an opportunity area to serve.

12.2.4 Opportunities to serve as a family in the church.

In order to provide some ideas on how you can pursue opportunities as a couple and family, here are a number of ideas of what you could do together in God's Work.

- Clean the church
- Visit the sick
- Hospital Ministry
- Host visitors in your home
- Help prepare food
- Host a small group in your home.
- Evangelism
- Childcare
- Call or visit people to encourage them.
- *Add other options that you identify.*

12.2.5 Extraordinary opportunities to serve as a family.

I add another list of specific activities that you may wish to consider when determining which area or ministry to serve in God's Work. We've done these things as a family, and this is when we've grown the most:

1. ***A different holiday.*** Sometimes we went as a family to visit brothers and sisters who live in low-income communities. To do this, beforehand we asked our friends for things they could donate, and then we took those plus our own contributions to distribute to people in need. We also had times of preaching or teaching.
2. ***Hospital ministry.*** Compassion is one of the means God has given us to meet the needs of others in order to share with them the message of salvation. I remember well how, together with our teenage daughters, we took food and shared the Word with people who were outside in the waiting area of a hospital. We did that for several years, consistently going once a week.
3. ***Visiting the sick.*** Going to pray for sick people is still a good opportunity for the family's faith to grow. (However, I suggest that you don't risk your family's health if there is a highly contagious disease.) When you go, have Bible passages selected beforehand to share with the sick person.
4. ***Visit an asylum.*** You will be surprised at how much need there is ... there are so many people who desperately need to feel loved by people and by God. It's also a great opportunity to share the gospel with them.
5. ***Start a project.*** God put the desire in our hearts to go and support communities and help meet needs there. On one occasion, God allowed us to help by providing pastors in an economically poor area with bicycles so that they could get to their churches more easily. It was very satisfying to see how we were able to get used bicycles, and then with the help of others in the church, we were able to repair and paint them so that they were in good condition.

6. ***Celebrating special occasions in disadvantaged neighborhoods.*** This is undoubtedly an experience that has marked us wonderfully. Take advantage of the dates that society celebrates: Mother's Day, Children's Day, etc. Be prepared to share your personal testimony.
7. ***Service as a lifestyle.*** Without a doubt, every day we are presented with opportunities to serve others in different ways. By doing so with agape love, they'll see Jesus in us. We must ask God to help us develop empathy so that we can see those around us as Jesus saw them, always detecting a need to solve. That served as a bridge to share the message of salvation.

12.3 Conclusions

Service is an extraordinary way to show God's love to others. In addition, it's one of the best opportunities to share the gospel with others.

When possible, do this together as a couple or as a family, taking the children when possible. Remember that there are countless opportunities to serve for Christ's sake. It only takes grateful hearts and hands willing to act. I'm sure that when you seek to serve together as a family, God will help you see the needs around you, show empathy, and help meet their needs.

In our Wesleyan and Nazarene traditions, service has always been carried forward by our love of neighbor and the fulfillment of God's Mission in mind. Let's also go forward as faithful stewards, using well all the resources that God has entrusted to us to help build His Kingdom. May God continue to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. Identify the spiritual gifts and talents of each member of your family.

2. Identify areas where you and your family can serve in your local church.

3. Make plans now to serve with love. Pray that God will lead you to the right opportunity to serve, and that you will use that opportunity to serve to bless others, strengthen your marriage and family, and for the building up of His Kingdom.

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